

JOHN JENKINS *Fantasias: Nos. 1–12 a 6. In nomines: Nos. 1–2 a 6. Pavan in F. Bell Pavan in a* • Phantasm (period instruments) • LINN 556 (Download: 66:07)

JOHN WARD *Fantasias: Nos. 1–7 a 6; Nos. 1–12 a 5. In nomines: Nos. 1–2 a 6; a 5* • Phantasm (period instruments) • LINN 339 (Download: 77:57)

I am dealing with these two releases together because neither is new and both have been reviewed previously, though one of them, the Jenkins, not in its current incarnation. So let me sort things out. First, if a record label's numbering scheme means anything, one assumes that the higher the number the more recent the recording. Not so in this case. The Jenkins release, bearing the number 556, was recorded in 2005; the Ward, bearing the number 339, was recorded in 2009. The Jenkins was originally released on Avie, the label under which Brian Robins reviewed it in 30:2, so we know this is a reissue on the Linn label. The Ward was reviewed by Barry Brenesal in 33:4, shortly after it was released as the same Linn BKD 339 as it appears here, so it has to be assumed that this is not a transfer from another label but an original Linn recording. This no doubt explains the higher number for the earlier recorded Jenkins: Linn acquired the Avie recording and reissued it on its own label in 2016, seven years after the Ward.

This does not explain, however, why we are now seeing recordings made eight and 12 years ago, and previously reviewed, turn up for review again. The answer to that has to do with Naxos of America, Inc., the largest record distributor in North America, and not only of its own Naxos label, but of hundreds of other independent labels, large and small, covering practically every musical genre—classical, jazz, pop, world, alternative, and Christian—which, if not for NOA, we would never see here in the States. Not a month goes by that Naxos of America doesn't take new labels into its fold, and Linn, being one of NOA's relatively recent acquisitions, explains why we are seeing the second coming of these Phantasm recordings.

Newly minted or not, I'm pleased to be able to review these two releases because one, I dearly love this music; two, it fleshes out our knowledge of a vast repository of works for viol consort composed from approximately the turn of the 17th century onward by quite a few composers centered around St. Paul's in London in early Stuart England; and three, these recordings are complementary to Phantasm's Linn recording of viol consort works by William Lawes, reviewed in

39:2.

John Jenkins (1592–1678) and John Ward (1589–1638) were part of this fairly large milieu of composers; Jenkins and Ward, in fact, were friends. Granted, without significant exposure to and perhaps even in-depth study of the music, it can be difficult to distinguish the viol consort works of one of these composers from another, but it should also be noted that many of them were quite versatile in providing both sacred vocal music for the church and rather more earthy vocal music in the form of ballads and bawdy catches, rounds, and canons.

By the mid-17th century the family of viols was on its way out, being succeeded by the newer violin family. Jenkins, who lived to be 86, saw the viols fall out of favor in his own lifetime; and though he was taken on by the Court of Charles II after the Restoration, English lawyer and biographer Roger North wrote of Jenkins, "Tho' he for many years was incapable to attend, the Court musicians had so much value for him, that advantage was not taken, but he received his salary as they were paid." Honor was accorded to a respected and beloved musician who was too infirm to play and whose music was no longer fashionable.

It may have fallen out of fashion for the King and his courtiers, but I find in this music an inner radiance and inexpressible tranquility that I could listen to forever. Listen to Jenkins's Pavan in F. The music sounds happy one moment and sad the next, but its enduring character is one of eternal beauty. I'm sure that life in 17th-century England was not as serene as much of this music suggests. James I and his successor Charles I squabbled incessantly with Parliament over who was in charge, religious divisions still roiled the kingdom, leading to a civil war in the 1640s, and those pesky Puritans set sail for the New World, where they promptly proceeded to burn suspected witches at the stake in Salem. Jenkins lived through much of this, yet none of it is reflected in this sublime music.

Like his contemporaries, John Ward also composed anthems, music for sacred services, and madrigals, in addition to works for viol consort. He was considerably shorter-lived than Jenkins, however, and his output isn't as large. Also, at least insofar as his viol consort works are concerned, Ward's style is said to be more conservative and perhaps more refined than Jenkins's. I'm not sure, however, that that is borne out by Ward's pieces heard here, which strike me as quite rhythmically intricate and harmonically bold. Listen, for example, to the Fantasia No. 7, which contains some very unusual and daring, for the time, chromatic passages.

Phantasm has been bringing us the English consort viol repertoire for almost a quarter of a century now since its founding in 1994, and it has distinguished itself as probably the leading ensemble of its type on the world stage today. For most of its existence Phantasm has been based in the UK, but as recently as 2015, the group moved its base of operations to Berlin, where longtime director Laurence Dreyfus continues his activities with the ensemble and pursues independent research in musicology, performance studies, and music analysis.

If you didn't acquire these recordings when they were first released, I strongly

urge you to do so now for an incredibly rewarding musical experience. **Jerry Dubins**

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JOHN JENKINS *Fantasias: Nos. 1–17 a 5. Pavans Nos. 1–3 • Phantasm* (period instruments) • LINN 557 (73:19)

JOHN JENKINS *Fantasias: Nos. 1–12 a 6. In nomines: Nos. 1–2 a 6. Pavan in F. Bell Pavan in a • Phantasm* (period instruments) • LINN 556 (66:07)

These two CDs were originally released by Avie in 2006 and 2007; the six-part consorts disc was reviewed in conjunction with an interview of the ensemble's leader, Laurence Dreyfus, by Brian Robins in 30:2, who then also reviewed the five-part consorts CD in 30:6. There is little need to add to his excellent overviews of these stellar recordings. To summarize briefly, the long-lived and prolific Jenkins (1592–1678), who composed over 800 works (mostly short dance pieces and suites), was a conservative both musically and politically. He remained loyal to old musical forms such as the *In nomine* and to the viol as an instrument even as it was being progressively displaced by the violin; he sided with the Royalists during the English Civil War and worked for two households of recusant nobility during that time. His fantasias for four-, five-, and six-part consorts are heirs of Renaissance polyphony; endowed with supple, soft-grained melodic lines, they are overwhelmingly cast in minor keys that lend them a frequently meditative and introspective but by no means mournful character. They are particularly notable for building up extensive, continuous movements of almost proto-symphonic dimensions, in contrast to the ones comprised of multiple short, discrete sections fashioned by most of his colleagues.

These performances of the complete five- and six-part consorts, *In nomines*, and pavaues are, simply put, superb. Phantasm has long ranked as one of the world's leading viol consorts, and everything it does here bears out that justly earned reputation. As Robins notes, an optional organ accompaniment is omitted, entirely to the good in my view. So far as I can ascertain, there is no competition for a full set of the five-part consorts, and the only alternative for the six-part ones is an Astrée Audivis CD with Jordi Savall's Hesperion XX (endorsed by Tom Moore in 15:6), offering renditions that are more luxuriant and less energetic, bigger-boned and sweeter in weight and timbre of sound. One cannot go wrong with either choice; I have a great love for both versions. For the 17 four-part consorts that Phantasm unfortunately has not recorded, one can choose between the Kölner Viol Consort (Thorofon, 1986), not reviewed in these pages; the Accademia

Strumentale Italiana (Stradivarius, 2015), favorably discussed by Bertil van Boer in 38:6; or Spirit of Gambo (Musica Ficta, 2011), approved by Christopher Brodersen in 35:5. Note that although Brodersen identified the latter set as complete in his review, based on online listings it appears to omit Fantasias Nos. 1, 4, 10, and 17. In any case, these reissues are heartily recommended. **James A. Altena**

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JOHN JENKINS Fantasias and Airs • The Locke Consort • CHANNEL CCS SA 17602 (Hybrid Multichannel SACD 73:39)

John Jenkins (1592-1678) was highly regarded in his lifetime as a composer of instrumental music, and more than 800 such works survive. Although Jenkins was no daring innovator, his well-crafted music evolved significantly over his long creative life, moving from older style polyphony towards the model of the Italian trio sonata. According to Dr. Andrew Ashbee, a Jenkins authority and the annotator for this release, the 15 fantasia-air pairs on this CD were probably composed for the Private Musick of Charles II's court, and are thus late works. The fantasias themselves are comprised of several contrasting sections, including "florid" passages (though not overly so: King Charles liked his musick with a beat), sections with sparser textures, triple meter dance-like interludes, and codas in 4/4 time. The airs possess two strains and are all in common time. Ashbee makes the case that the continuo part may have originally been played on theorbo (Jenkins' instrument) rather than organ, and The Locke Consort's theorbo player, Fred Jacobs, notes that the part fits "like a glove." Likewise, the two treble parts work splendidly with violins.

The program certainly helps one understand why Jenkins was so popular in his time. The music is varied in tone and mood (eight of the 15 pieces are in major keys, seven in minor) and each example has an appealing emotional trajectory that makes listening to five or six in succession a pleasure. The performances could not be better—they are obviously historically informed, but are vibrant and rhythmically alert. Slow sections are played with a keen sense of melodic line and harmonic flow. Intonation is flawless, and technique unfailingly clean.

This disc is a hybrid multichannel SACD (and if you need your memory refreshed as to what exactly that is, please refer to my review of another Channel Classics release, *Love & Lament*, in the "Collections" section of this issue). The two-channel SACD version reproduces lovely string sonorities; anyone left with doubts about the potential for beautiful sound from "original instruments" must hear the richly textured—yet bracingly clear—tone quality of the two 17th-century violins employed here. The regular CD layer is not far behind—only direct comparison to

the higher resolution format reveals the 16-bit/44.1 kHz technology as slightly less refined. The surround sound version (five channels) presents the four players almost holographically. As I am set up for multichannel SACD playback, I wouldn't listen to this disc any other way, but with either stereo version you'll still get the full musical effect of this excellent recital. **Andrew Quint**

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Jenkins Fantasias, etc./Locke Consort

Review by: David Vernier *Artistic Quality: 9* *Sound Quality: 9*

Fans of early—in this case 17th century—consort music will find much to enjoy on this program of “Fantasias and Airs” by English composer John Jenkins. The Locke Consort, an experienced and acclaimed ensemble based in the Netherlands, presents these 15 selections in clearly defined, richly colored performances, intimately and faithfully captured by Channel Classics’ producer/engineer Jared Sacks. The combination of two baroque violins, gamba, and theorbo creates a distinctly brighter sound than a typical viol consort—the violin lines, especially, are more prominent. Nevertheless, the blend and balance are carefully maintained, and the players never hold back their natural expressive tendencies. In other words, in the hands of these very capable players the music, which has an inherent lightness and rhythmic spring, is given full opportunity to exhibit its extrovert character.

Now, if this review sounds vaguely familiar, you might remember my recent discussion of this same disc (type Q4668 in Search Reviews)—or was it? That CD, which comes in a special heavier, rounded-corner jewel box was the Super Audio/Stereo Multi-Channel version, mastered for those enthusiasts with correspondingly special playback equipment. As I said in my original review, even with a good-quality standard CD player you can “appreciate the clear, natural sound and realistic room ambience captured on this recording.” The question is, how does the subject of this review—a non-SACD, non-multi-channel, regular ol’ disc (albeit recorded using the same microphones and digital converter) compare when played on that same standard CD player? Is there enough difference in sound (or any difference) to warrant springing for the more expensive SACD even if you don’t have Super Audio equipment? In a word, the answer is “no”. However, in a few more words, there is a difference in clarity and dynamic depth—that is, with the SACD you feel more realistic presence of the instruments and a fuller range of volume that gives particular substance to the bass. This regular ol’ CD is still better-sounding than most and without A/B comparison you’ll not find anything lacking. The choice, of course, is yours.

John JENKINS (1592-1678) - MusicWeb Review Hamburger Ratsmusik

Fantasy Suites

Aria in A [2:54]

Suite in a minor [10:50]

Sonata in d minor/D [4:40]

Divisions in A [9:11]

Suite No. 17 in e minor [9:24]

Pieces in A (ms Goëss) [6:17]

Suite No. 11 in c minor [8:44]

Suite in g minor [10:47]

Hamburger Ratsmusik (Christoph Heidemann (violin); Simone Eckert (viola da gamba); Ulrich Wedemeier (theorbo); Michael Fürst (organ))

rec. 14-16 May 2008, Siemensvilla, Berlin, Germany. DDD

PHOENIX EDITION 141 [63:03]

John Jenkins is one of the most remarkable English composers of the 17th century. He reached the exceptional age of 86 which means that he experienced the many trials and tribulations in politics and society including the Commonwealth and the Restoration. He also saw the aesthetics change from the late Elizabethan era to the period we call 'baroque'. And these changes left their mark on his oeuvre.

He left over 800 compositions, but that is practically all we know about him. No portrait, very little biographical detail - he didn't even make efforts to get his music printed. Apart from pieces which were included in contemporary collections his music was not printed before the 20th century. From what was written about him one gets the impression he was a very modest character. His pupil Roger North wrote: "Mr Jenkins was a very gentile and well bred gentleman, and was allways not onely welcome, but greatly valued by the familys wherever he had taught and convers't. He was constantly complaisant in every thing desired of him ..."

When after the Restoration he became part of the Private Musick at court he was paid until his death, even though he wasn't able to play any more due to his age - another sign of the high respect he enjoyed.

This disc gives a nice overview of the change in style which can be traced in his oeuvre. The programme contains four so-called 'Fantasy-suites', a modern term for a fantasy which is followed by two shorter movements. The Suites Nos. 11 and 17 are from a collection of 17, in which the opening fantasy is followed by an almain

and an ayr. These pieces are rooted in the consort music of the renaissance era. It is nevertheless remarkable that the treble part is written for the violin rather than the treble viol. At the time these suites were probably written the violin was a new and still relatively unknown instrument in England. He must have known the violin from his childhood as in this parents' household there were "Seven Vialls and Violyns". John Jenkins was the first composer in England to write for the violin.

The other two suites are stylistically different as they make use of the diminution technique which had become very popular on the continent and was used in England in particular by Christopher Simpson. The parts for the violin and the viola da gamba have become considerably more virtuosic and are treated in a more individualistic way. The whole range of the viola da gamba is explored up to its limit. In addition, whereas the organ part in the early suites was written out, here the bass consists of a genuine basso continuo part.

Also late compositions are the Aria in A and the Sonata in d minor/D. The Aria is a beautiful melodious piece showing Jenkins' "lyrical inventiveness" as Andrew Ashbee describes one of the composer's features in his article in New Grove.

This disc also contains two pieces for the 'lyra viol'. The first is the Divisions in A with basso continuo, which according to Simone Eckert are putting even Christopher Simpson in the shade. I don't know about that but it is certainly right to bracket them together.

The four pieces in A are written for viola da gamba solo, and come from a manuscript called "ms Goëss" which is preserved in Ebenthal in Austria. It is very likely this manuscript was put together by Dietrich Steffkin, a close friend of Jenkins, who had worked in England but lived in the Netherlands during the Commonwealth period and not only collected music but also sent Jenkins the newest music from the continent. The manuscript contains a number of pieces by both Jenkins and Steffkin.

As one may gather from this description of the programme this disc is highly interesting and contains a good variety of styles and compositional genres. And thanks to the interpretation by the Hamburger Ratsmusik it is also a very entertaining and captivating disc. The four players are all excellent musicians who impress with their impeccable technique. They have also captured the spirit and the style of Jenkins' music very well. I know some older recordings of English 17th-century music by German musicians which were too rigid and too stiff, but nothing of that is noticeable here. The interpreters play with great vitality and rhythmic precision. The sound of the violin and the viola da gamba is brilliant and the balance within the ensemble is also very good.

Simone Eckert has written lucid programme notes in German. Unfortunately the English translation is not always correct and sometimes misses the mark.

This is an outstanding disc which makes Jenkins shine and sheds light on the unique talent of this English master of the 17th century. And as he left more than 800 compositions there is definitely still a lot of work to do.

Johan van Veen