CD REVIEWS

The views expressed here are those of the reviewers only and do not imply any ‘official’ view of the Lute Society. Reviews are printed in roughly historical order of repertoire. A picture gallery of covers of the CDs reviewed here can be found in The Lutezine PDF colour supplement to this issue.

Erratum

His Golden Locks, Ludy Vrijdag (tenor) and David van Ooijen (lute) has wrong details attached to it, i.e. Carpe Diem CD-37289 (which is Tony Bailes CD of Lute Music of the Netherlands). The CD is privately issued, and if anyone would like a copy they should contact davidvanooijen@gmail.com and he will take care of it.

Adios mi amor: duets for vihuelas Delitiae Musicae, Brilliant Classics 94302.

The surviving repertoire for two vihuelas is very small, just the pieces in Valderabano’s Silvia de Sirenas published in 1547, but players must often have got together and made their own arrangements for as many players as were available and that is what the two members of Delitiae Musicae, Jesús Sánchez and Manuel Minguillón Nieto, have done.

The programme is pleasantly varied and embraces pieces from Italian and French as well as Spanish sources. A number of well-known vihuela pieces are provided with a second improvised part and the duo have made some entirely new arrangements of vocal pieces of their own, including several secular pieces by Guerrero and a lovely version of Victoria’s ‘O magnum mysterium’. A welcome contrast in timbre is provided by three 4-course guitar pieces with an added part for 7-course lute, Mudarra’s Romanesca and a set of variations on Conto Clare and Gaillarde/Romanesca by Guillaume Morlaye. The recording wouldn’t be complete without music by Valderrabano himself. Two intabulations of sacred pieces, Gombert’s ‘Assiste parata’ and Morales’ ‘Et in Spiritum Sanctum’ are included together with his two attractive sets of variations, ‘Musica para discantar sobre un punto’ and ‘Sobre el tenor del conde claros’. There are some interesting pieces from later manuscript sources, including ‘Ramillete de flores’ and the Barbarino manuscript. The recording ends with a set of diferencias on a version of the caravanda, more familiar from Sanz. This was copied together with sets of diferencias on the folias and saltarello into the exemplar of Silvia de Sirenas now in the Austrian National Library in Vienna, presumably in the early 17th century. Each artist also has a chance to play a few solo numbers.

Sánchez plays a 7-course vihuela by Lourdes Uncilla and Minguillón a 6-course vihuela by Francisco Hervás. The two instruments blend perfectly and the rapport between the two players ensures a seamless ensemble. Interestingly although the duo are Spanish they have chosen to record the music in St. Andrew’s Church, Tooting, in Gloucestershire, designed by the architect George E Street in the 19th century. This seems to be a popular venue for recordings of this kind and it is not difficult to understand why as its acoustics favour the instruments, not overly resonant and creating a welcome sense of intimacy. Enjoyable in every way.

Monica Hall

Blame not my lute, Jacob Heringman, lute, Magnature.com / The Lute Society

‘Fifty-eight instrumental tracks are exceptionally soothing and are perfect for any time you’d like to bring a little peace into your day’. Nice try, Magnature, but the real point of this CD is as a companion piece to the Lute Society’s publication 58 Very Easy Pieces for Renaissance Lute. It’s available from the Lute Society or as a download from magnature.com, who originally released the recording in 2006. You can also stream it online for free from Magnature, but the commercials after each of the 58 tracks become wearing after a while (these disappear if you subscribe).

The slide up to the bass note in bar three of the first track is the first indication that all will not be exactly as written. Jacob Heringman follows the advice in the introduction to the book that ‘more advanced players might care to practise their hand at ornamentation and division-making on some of the materials here’. So while the primary purpose of the CD may be to illustrate to students how the pieces should sound, and to help choose which pieces to learn, it’s also a valuable master class in how to ‘deck other songs and dances with like flowers and ornaments’ (as Adrian Le Roy expressed it in 1574). Jacob Heringman typically plays each piece straight the first time, then repeats with divisions, bringing a basic text to life. This brings the total playing time of the album up to 47 minutes: these pieces are very much miniatures.

Jacob Heringman’s playing is always a pleasure to hear, with distinctive and attractive gut stringing on all of the six courses of the instrument, complemented by a warm recorded sound quality. He approaches even the smallest piece with respect and conviction, turning it into a miniature performance piece and thereby encouraging students to do the same. I’m not sure that any lute music is actually ‘very easy’, but the book and CD do a good job of grading the music in order of difficulty, encouraging the student with a sense of progression and continuing achievement.

Peter Martin

Byrd & Dowland: Ye Sacred Muses, Complaintes, Élégies et Chansons, Jean-Michel Fumas, countertenor, Eliza Consort, Ameson ASCP 1122

This collection of music for voice, viols and lute brings together works by Byrd, Dowland, Coprario, Rosseter, Parsons—and the anonymous ‘Willow Song’. Byrd is represented by five consort songs, including the elegy for Thomas Tallis which gives the album its title, as well as a viol fantasy. Three of the songs have discreet lute parts added. From Dowland we have ‘In Darkness let me dwell’, and ‘I saw my lady weep’ sung to the solo lute along with three more songs with added viols. Rosseter’s ‘What then is love dwelling’, and the ‘Willow Song’ have added viol parts. There is also a viol fantasy by Coprario.

This range of forces gives the recital its variety, but the voice of Jean-Michel Fumas is a constant, binding it all together. It’s therefore a pity to report that the singing is not the strongest part of the recital. He sings evenly with a pleasant tone and good intonation, but the most obvious weaknesses are audibility against the viols and diction. It is very hard to hear the words clearly, even against solo lute where balance is not a problem. Furthermore, although his accent is much more English than French there are some oddities of pronunciation that make following the text harder than it should be. The projection is not helped by a recorded sound that is rather heavy in the mid-bass and a balance that strongly favours the viols. A further issue for me was his restricted emotional range. Much of this music is anguished or despondent, but Fumas seems to prioritise making a nice sound over dramatising the text. The Eliza Consort, four viols and lute, plays cleanly and the viols blend well. The viol fantasies, in particular have good momentum.