

Abel - Mr Abel's Fine Airs (2007)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 26 October 2018 13:02 -

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1 *Adagio* WKO189 2 *Vivace* Wko190 3 *Allegro* 4 *Tempo Minuetto* Wko154 5
Adagio Wko209 6 [*Arpeggio*] Wko205 7 [*Tempo di Menuet Con Variazioni*] Wko203 &
Wko204 8 [*Moderato*] Wko208 9 [*Adagio*] Wko187 10 *Fuga* Wko196 11 *Sonata In G*
Major For Viola Da Gamba 12 *Allegro* Wko198 13 *Tempo di Menuet* Wko202 14
Andante Wko191 15 [*Arpeggio*] Wko194 16 *Allegro* Wko207 17 *Tempo di Menuet*
Wko188 18 [*Andante*] Wko199 19 [*Allegro*] WKO195 20 *Allegretto* Wko211 21 *Allegro*
WKO212 Susanne Heinrich - Viola da Gamba

Carl Friedrich Abel's most frequently recorded repertoire heretofore would include what remains of his symphonies, concerti -- mostly those for the flute -- and a smattering of chamber sonatas, many of them also for flute. While Abel did not compose operas apart from a few inserts, his surviving music is heavy with items originating from an expansionist and professional area of his talent; works written to fill the bill on concerts, for to accommodate published sets and the like. Abel's contemporaries, though, are in uniform accord in remembering him that his greatest achievements were not witnessed in the concert hall, but in the late evenings at private homes, performing on his main instrument -- the viola da gamba -- for a few friends. With Susanne Heinrich's Hyperion disc *Mr. Abel's Fine Airs* we are finally accorded a substantive glimpse of the private side of Abel, and it is telling.

Of Abel's output for solo gamba, nearly 80 pieces survive, though the majority of these are relatively simple works intended for teaching purposes; most don't even bear tempo indications. Heinrich, of the ex-Palladian Ensemble now Palladian Trio, has selected 24 movements from about 30 that are more ambitious and not obviously oriented to pedagogical purposes. The result is a rich and highly varied program that puts to the test Walter Knappe's assertion that Abel's music was "a refined, urbane version of the Mannheim style with perhaps an Italian influence in the more vocal melodies." There are many instances among these solo pieces where Abel leaves the galant mannerisms of his era aside in music reminiscent of the late Baroque -- the world of Johann Sebastian Bach, Sylvius Leopold Weiss, and Marin Marais.

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Although some of these mostly un-datable pieces may actually have originated from before 1755 when Abel is believed to have left Germany for London, others may be late reflections on the Baroque solo idiom, not unlike the solo cello pieces of Joseph-Marie-Clément Dall'Abaco lately recorded by Kirstin von der Goltz, which date from around 1760 or later. The Adagio WKO 209 puts Knape on the fence over his assertion that there "is little trace of deeper emotion or Sturm und Drang" in Abel -- it is all that and more. This recital is jam-packed with compositional devices that conventional wisdom tells us Abel did not use and pieces that are but more reserved in style, Heinrich brings a remarkable flexibility and fluidity of expression, accentuating what Burney called "[Abel]'s discretion [and] taste [in]...breathing a few notes."

All of these pieces are intensely personal and played with discipline, respect, and yet a sense of freedom by Heinrich -- exactly the traits Abel's friends so admired in his own playing. There is no doubt that Abel was the last of the great viola da gamba players before the instrument went into a period of a century and a half of dust and silence; but until Mr. Abel's Fine Airs we have experienced little first-hand evidence of what his artistry might have been like. Mr. Abel's Fine Airs is an urgently important release in a historical sense and a very satisfying one for general listening purposes; while gamba fanciers and enthusiasts of eighteenth century music will love it the most, it's hard to imagine any lover of great music not wanting to experience it; Hyperion's Mr. Abel's Fine Airs is very "fine" indeed. ---Uncle Dave Lewis, AllMusic Review

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