Giovanni Baptista Sammartini – Six Symphonies (Mallon) [2003]



Symphony in A Major, J-C 62 *1. I. Presto 00:02:26 2. II. Andante e pianissimo 00:02:15 3. IIIa. Presto assai 00:03:15 4. IIIb. Allegro (alternative finale) 00:02:09*
Symphony in C Minor, J-C 9
5. I. Allegro 00:02:24 6. II. Affettuoso 00:04:02 7. III. Allegro 00:02:09
Symphony in D Major, J-C 16
8. I. Alla breve 00:02:15 9. II. Andante sempre piano 00:02:55 10. III. Presto 00:01:23
Symphony in F Major, J-C 36
11. I. Presto 00:02:17 12. II. Andante 00:05:00 13. III. Allegro assai 00:01:35
Symphony in D Minor, J-C 23
14. I. Allegro 00:03:30 15. II. Grave 00:06:42 16. III. Presto 00:03:40
Symphony in C Major, J-C 4
17. I. Allegrissimo 00:05:09 18. II. Andante e affettuoso 00:03:30 19. III. Allegrissimo 00:03:48
Aradia Ensemble Kevin Mallon – Conductor

Giovanni Battista Sammartini (St. Martini, San Martini, etc.) is another of those almost countless composers whose names have more or less fallen into the cracks in the floor of music history. Born in late 1700 or early 1701 in Milan, Sammartini ,an oboist, spent all his life in the city. He was the seventh of eight children born to a French father, Alexis St. Martin, an oboist who emigrated to Italy, and an Italian mother.

Sammartini was well established in his hometown by the time he was 25. His Christmas oratorio, Gesu bambino adorato dall' pastori , was composed in 1726 and performed to unanimous critical and public acclaim, although the German flutist and composer J. J. Quantz wrote in less than complimentary terms of Sammartini's musical gifts; apparently Quantz had been possessed by the proverbial Green-Eyed Monster.

The 1730s saw a steady stream of well-written symphonies, concertos, sonatas, and dramatic works from Sammartini's pen. His music also began to receive recognition outside of Italy; his initial foray into the genre of opera, Memet , was performed in Lodi in 1732 and possibly in Vienna the same year. It wasn't long before Sammartini had become the leading figure in the earliest symphonic school in Europe. It included such now-obscure names as Brioschi, Galimberti, Giulini, Lampugnani, and Chiesa.

In spite of his reputation in Italy, Sammartini's music was better known beyond its borders. Publishers such as Leclerc (Paris) and Walsh (London) engraved Sammartini's music, and one of his symphonies was performed in Amsterdam in 1738. In Paris, the Concert Spirituel performed a Sammartini symphony in 1751; his music was equally popular in England, being admired and praised by the Duke of Cumberland, brother of George III.

Sammartini's 67 surviving symphonies exhibit the gradual but dramatic stylistic shift from the Baroque to the Classical idiom; the six recorded here stem from his early period (1724-39) to around 1750. In addition to the obvious and expected stylistic progression, Sammartini also increased and strengthened the orchestra in his later symphonies by adding parts for oboes, horns, and trumpets. Most of the early symphonies omit violas; the middle symphonies employ trumpets and horns, and the late symphonies, none of which are offered here, include independent parts for oboes.

Kevin Mallon and his exceptional little band have a string of fine recordings on Naxos, including instrumental music by Boyce, Wassenaer, and Boismortier; there are also recordings of choral and vocal music by Caldara and Wanhal. Furthermore, they have begun a cycle of Vivaldi's sacred music. Mallon's musicians are well tuned to the repertoire they have recorded, and in each and every CD from Naxos they demonstrate an exceptional command of their period instruments. Stylistic idiosyncrasies are bypassed; instead, Mallon opts for sound musical judgment, resulting in a release that is leisurely paced, but never lacking in vitality, excitement, or commitment. The running time of the disc, just over an hour, is somewhat stingy and could have allowed for the inclusion of one of the later symphonies and a broader picture of Sammartini's work in the genre, but I won't complain in excess, for what is here has delighted this auditor repeatedly. --- Michael Carter, Fanfare

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