Agostino Steffani – Danze e Ouvertures (2013)



01. Orlando generoso: I. Ouverture 02. II. Menuet 03. III. Prelude: Tres viste 04. IV. Gavotte 05. V. Menuet 06. VI. Bourree 07. VII. Gigue 08. Marco Aurelio: Sinfonia 09. Henrico Leone: I. Ouverture 10. II. Air: Grave 11. III. Prelude pour les Demons: Tres viste 12. I trionfi del fato: Ouverture 13. Le rivali concordi: Sarabande. Tres lentement 14 Tassilone: Sinfonia 15. Niobe, regina di Tebe: I. Ouverture 16. II. Ritornello tiberino 17. III. Terremoto 18. IV. Marcia di Creonte 19. La lotta d'Hercole con Acheloo: Ouverture 20. I trionfi del fato: Les Ombres. Grave 21. Le rivali concordi: Ouverture 22. Henrico Leone: Chaconne 23. Briseide: Ouverture 24. Orlando generoso: Gsavotte en Rondeau 25. La superbia d'Alessandro: I. Ouverture 26. II. Air: Tres viste 27. III. Menuet 28. IV. Gavotte 29. V. Air: Tendre 30. VI. Air: Viste 31. Alcibiade (La liberta contenta): I. Ouverture 32. II. Gavotte 33. III. Passepied en Rondeau 34. IV. Gigue 35. Servio Tullio: Sinfonia 36. I trionfi del fato: I. Sarabande. Lentement 37. II. Premier Rigaudon - Second Rigaudon 38. Niobe, regina di Tebe: Gavotta 39. La lotta d'Hercole con Acheloo: I. Premier Air: Lentement - Viste - Lentement 40. II. Second Air pour les mesmes: Gigue 41. III. Troisieme Air pour les mesmes. Sarabande 42. IV. Gigue da capo 43. Amor vien dal destino: Introduzione al drama Coro della Radiotelevisione Svizzera I Barocchisti Conductor - Diego Fasolis

The booklet to this release freely concedes that Agostino Steffani (1654-1728) wrote no instrumental music, making the present collection unusually obscure in terms of repertoire for a major-label release. What you get is a set of operatic overtures and dance excerpts from operas, similar enough to what might be presented on an album of instrumental music, from operas 150 years later. But until his operas were championed by Cecilia Bartoli, few had heard of Steffani, who was a leading star of vocal music in Germany in Corelli's day and was listened to all over the continent. It all goes to show how the Baroque revival is no longer confined to small specialist labels. The chief interest in these little pieces lies perhaps in their influence. The "danze e ouvertures" title, partly Italian and partly French, suggests what's going on here: the music, well before Bach and Couperin, contains multiple national styles. The overtures often contain a slow introduction and a fast conclusion, but the fast part consists of Italianate operatic-dramatic music, not French formal dance music. Most of the music here is receiving its recorded premiere, but it would have been well known when Bach was young, and it is

ancestral to both the general dance suite and the church and chamber sonata. The performances by I Barocchisti and its leader, Diego Fasolis, are ideal: they have Fasolis' trademark vigor, and they capture what was new and exciting about the music at the time. Though no more than a few minutes long, some of the pieces have vivid programmatic effects, including in one case battle music complete with a big bass drum. You may never have heard of Steffani, and the primary interest of this album may be to Baroque fans, but Decca is right to take a chance on it: anyone can enjoy it. ---James Manheim, Rovi

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