

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck - Fortune My Foe (2010)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Fantasia Chromatica a 4* [08:20] 02. *Puer nobis nascitur* [02:38] 03. *Pavana Hispanica* [02:17] 04. *Balleth del granduca* [04:31] 05. *Onder een linde groen* [04:55] 06. *Engelse Fortuijn* [*Fortune my foe*] [02:54] 07. *Paduana Lachrymae* [04:49] 08. *Ach Gott vom Himmel sieh darein* [05:03] 09. *Mein junges Leben hat ein End'* [05:54] 10. *Toccata in d* [03:00] 11. *Malle Sijmen* [01:18] 12. *Fantazia op de Fuga van M: Jan Pieters. Fecit Dr. Bull 1621* [04:12]

Alina Rotaru – harpsichord

The music of Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562–1621) is beloved by organists, and rightly so. The obligatory piece or two of Sweelinck will turn up now and again on organ recitals, especially those given by organ grad students at major conservatories. Sweelinck has been relatively neglected by harpsichordists, though, and there is a possible explanation for that. Since most of his music is manualiter (for manuals only without pedal), it falls to the performer to decide which pieces work best on harpsichord. I can imagine that the very act of sorting through the music has deterred a lot of them. Many pieces are effective on either instrument, but some, such as the *Fantasia chromatica*, should only be played on harpsichord, although that hasn't stopped organists from trying. A quick check of ArkivMusic produced exactly two items devoted entirely to harpsichord: Volume 2 of the complete keyboard works on Chandos recorded in 2009 by Robert Wolley, and a single Naxos CD recorded by Glen Wilson, neither of which has been reviewed in Fanfare. I haven't heard either one, but I have no hesitation in recommending the present Carpe Diem CD as the ideal place to start one's exploration of Sweelinck's harpsichord music.

Alina Rotaru is a young Rumanian harpsichordist who currently resides in Bremen, Germany. On the booklet cover her photograph shows a rather serious-looking young lady—perhaps the cares of the world are weighing down heavily on her. She can rest assured, however, that with playing as accomplished as this, she has a brilliant career ahead. Her keyboard work in the *Fantasia chromatica* is amazing. She starts out slowly and deliberately and then builds to a spectacular finish; the sweeping 32nd-note runs in the concluding section will take your breath

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away. The Ballet del granduca , often heard on organ recitals, is likewise given the grand treatment. Every tune is gauged perfectly, including the one that gives the CD its title, Fortune My Foe. It is based on a piece from the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book by William Byrd, but with added embellishments and florid passages. Paduana lachrymae is a note-for-note transcription of Dowland's famous Flow My Teares , surprisingly effective on the harpsichord. Ach Gott vom Himmel sieh darein is an elaboration of a Lutheran hymn tune, the sort of thing that Sebastian Bach would be famous for 100 years later. Mein junges Leben is Sweelinck's complex and virtuosic rendition of a popular German song, while Malle Sijmen is a lighthearted version of an English folk song. The program concludes fittingly with John Bull's Fantazia op de Fuga , a lament written in 1621 on the death of Sweelinck. Bull, Sweelinck, and Dowland were all born in the same year, and Bull, who lived in Antwerp, knew Sweelinck personally. The music of this era contains many fascinating cross-references and borrowings, nowhere more apparent than in the pieces that Rotaru has so aptly selected for this program.

Rotaru succeeds in this repertoire where others fail thanks to a rock-steady rhythmic pulse and honest, self-effacing musicianship. Although it's often difficult to put a finger on it, her style is exactly right. I never get the feeling, for example, that she plays this music because it's historically "important"; she plays it because she believes in it. The music comes through with all its brilliance and structural complexity intact, high praise indeed for any performer.

The harpsichord is a Ruckers copy by Fred Bettenhuasen of Haarlem, and it is the perfect choice for the music. Although no details are given, I presume from the sound that it's a small, single-manual instrument with two eight-foot registers. The recorded sound leaves nothing to be desired. Urgently recommended. ---FANFARE: Christopher Brodersen, arkivmusic.com

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