Francesco Maria Veracini - 5 Overtures for the Dresden Court (1994)



1. Ouverture No.1 In B Flat Major - 1. Largo-Allegro-Largo-Allegro 5:04 2. Ouverture No.1 In B Flat Major - 2. Menuett 3:01 3. Ouverture No.1 In B Flat Major - 3. Sarabande 3:54 4. Ouverture No.1 In B Flat Major - 4. Aire. Allegro 1:57 play *5. Ouverture No.2 In F Major - 1. Largo - Allegro-Largo-Allegro 3:20 6. Ouverture No.2 In F Major - 2. Gavotte 4:42 7. Ouverture No.2 In F Major - 3. Sarabande. Lento 2:27 8. Ouverture No.2 In F Major - 4. Menuett 3:55 9. Ouverture No.2 In F Major - 5. Gigue 3:34 10. Ouverture No.2 In F Major - 6. Menuett 1:21 11. Ouverture No.3 In B Flat Major - 1. Largo - Allegro 2:47 12. Ouverture No.3 In B Flat Major - 2. Aire. Allegro 3:31 13. Ouverture No.3 In B Flat Major - 3. Allegro 2:15 14. Ouverture No.3 In B Flat Major - 4. Sarabande 2:11 15. Ouverture No.3 In B Flat Major - 5. Gigue 2:13 16. Ouverture No.4 In F Major - 1. Largo - Allegro 3:50 17. Ouverture No.4 In F Major - 2. Gavotte. Allegro 1:07 18. Ouverture No.4 In F Major - 3. (Appoggiata) 4:53 19. Ouverture No.4 In F Major - 4. Gavotte Ou Rondeau. Allegro 1:42 20. Ouverture No.4 In F Major - 5. Gigue 1:57* play *21. Ouverture No.6 In B Flat Major - 1. Allegro 3:19 22. Ouverture No.6 In B Flat Major - 2. Largo 2:24 23. Ouverture No.6 In B Flat Major - 3. Allegro 3:01 24. Ouverture No.6 In B Flat Major - 4. Menuett 2:01*

Musica Antiqua Köln Reinhard Goebel – conductor

The best compliment I can pay these five overtures (concerti grossi, really) by Franceco Maria Veracini is to say they have a Handelian melodiousness about them that raises them above similar efforts by Geminiani, for instance. Maybe it's the fact that Veracini wrote these works for Dresden, where they may have liked a good tune more than Italian theatrics. Whatever the cause, these works are clouded by few minor-key excursions (except in No. 6 in B-flat major, which seems almost to spend more of its time in related minor keys than in the major key) and have an overall bonhomie and even playfulness that bring them far closer to Handel's idiom than to that of Vivaldi or Bach. Perhaps the most winningly Handelian of all is No. 3. Incidentally, No. 6, the darkest of the lot, is also the least attractive and has a downright grating final minuet; this piece may have been a failed experiment by Veracini.

If the Overtures aren't great music, I think they are very good music, and Goebel makes a very good case for them, with the exception of No. 6. Then again, you may not agree with my assessment; you may find No. 6 winning as well. In any event, this disc is certainly worth a try, and Veracini is a composer worth getting to know. --- M. C. Passarella "lpassarella" (Lawrenceville, GA)

It's easy to imagine a young German boy in the 20th C -- a 12-year-old Reinhard Goebel-- straining his will to call up the Devil and trade his soul for a phenomenal virtuosity on the violin. That was the image of Paganini and his predecessors as reigning fiddle-master. But the image was formed long before Paganini; as Goebel himself writes: "..writers and readers alike lost their ability to differentiate between Vivaldi, Veracini, Tartini, Locatelli, Pugnani and Paganini. Pictorial representations of them are markedly similar: we see gentlemen with blunt hooked noses, wild hair, and eccentrically contorted bodies - a signal that the art of playing the violin was ... something diabolical."

Francesco Veracini (1690-1768) may well have been the prototype of that image, especially the feature of a contorted body. A haughty and turbulent character, Veracini once jumped from a second-story window, damaged his leg, and walked with a limp for the rest of his life. Antonio Vivaldi, with his fiery red hair, was of course another prototype of the restless violin virtuoso. Veracini and Vivaldi were explicit rivals for the adulation of Venetians and Central Europeans. It was Veracini who gained the most success north of the Alps, particularly in Dresden at the Court of August the Strong and his son Prince Friedrich August. Between roughly 1720 and 1750, Dresden was musical heaven for diabolical musicians; Veracini was paid a salary there that would make a modern-day athlete's agent salivate. Many of Veracini's compositions, including the overtures on this CD, were dedicated to the Elector-Kings of Dresden/Saxony/Poland. It would seem that August and Friedrich August had a taste for vigorous musical effects - broad, rhapsodic, exuberant rather than polished and proportioned - 'gusto barbarico' from the venetian point of view. Veracini certainly catered to his patrons' taste; these overtures are as exuberant as any strongman prince could have craved. They're also quite musically witty and original, full of surprises, anything but predictable baroque table-music.

That boy Reinhard Goebel may or may not have made his deal with the Devil, but in either case he become possibly the most virtuosic fiddler of his generation, a legend among baroque performers and fans. Then, in mid career, he suffered an arm injury that curtailed his displays of virtuosity for several years. Nevertheless, his ensemble Musica Antiqua Köln continued to thrive and to achieve the highest technical standards of performance, with dozens of superb

recordings. Goebel, meanwhile, retrained himself to play, first the viola and then again the violin, using his left arm to bow.

This recording of five Veracini Overtures was made in 1993. It doesn't feature Goebel in the role of fiery fiddler, but rather Goebel as the masterful conductor of the most precise and polished baroque orchestra of its time. It's deliberately anti-profound music, a little bumptious and even raucous but always entertaining. --- lunch.com/Reviews

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