

Geminiani - La Folia (1988)

Written by bluesever

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1. Sonata No. 3 in F major: Sonata No. 3 in F major - Largo 2. Sonata No. 3 in F major: Sonata No. 3 in F major - Andante 3. Sonata No. 3 in F major: Sonata No. 3 in F major - Allegro 4. Concerto Grosso 'La Folia' 5. Sonata No. 3 in E minor op. 1 no 3: Sonata No. 3 in E minor op. 1 no 3 - Adagio - Allegro - Adagio 6. Sonata No. 3 in E minor op. 1 no 3: Sonata No. 3 in E minor op. 1 no 3 - Tempo giusto - Adagio 7. Sonata No. 3 in E minor op. 1 no 3: Sonata No. 3 in E minor op. 1 no 3 - Allegro 8. Sonata No. 5 in A minor: Sonata No. 5 in A minor - Spiritoso [play](#) 9. Sonata No. 5 in A minor: Sonata No. 5 in A minor - Andante 10. Sonata No. 5 in A minor: Sonata No. 5 in A minor - Allegro 11. Sonata No. 6 in D minor - Andante 12. Sonata No. 6 in D minor: Sonata No. 6 in D minor - Allegro 13. Sonata No. 6 in D minor: Sonata No. 6 in D minor - Allegro 14. Sonata in A major op. 4 no 12: Sonata in A major op. 4 no 12 - Adagio - Presto 15. Sonata in A major op. 4 no 12: Sonata in A major op. 4 no 12 - Presto 16. Sonata in A major op. 4 no 12: Sonata in A major op. 4 no 12 - Presto 17. Concerto Grosso in G minor op 7 no 2: Concerto Grosso in G minor op 7 no 2 - Grave - Allegro 18. Concerto Grosso in G minor op 7 no 2: Concerto Grosso in G minor op 7 no 2 - Andante 19. Concerto Grosso in G minor op 7 no 2: Concerto Grosso in G minor op 7 no 2 – Allegro [play](#)

Purcell Band, Purcell String Quartet, Robert Woolley, Richard Boothby, Catherine Mackintosh

This is a reissue – and a welcome one – on Hyperion's Helios label; it's a collection of string pieces by the late Baroque composer Francesco Geminiani. First released twenty years ago, it makes a valid and representative introduction to some of the strengths of Geminiani. At the same time the selection highlights the skills and interpretative powers of performers, many of whom were just beginning to make names for themselves in the 1980s and are now firmly established as specialists in their fields. Indeed the Purcell Quartet was in the middle of a wider series of chamber music based on La Folia. Geminiani's Concerto Grosso is actually the only work on this disc so based. It's beautifully played here, though. There is energy, a sailing and uplifting movement in what's already a lively and extrovert theme. The other Concerto Grosso, the G Minor Opus 7 number 2, is tackled just as stylishly and should convince anyone sceptical

of Geminiani's place in the canon that his blend of thematic thrift and apposite instrumentation admirably vindicates his champions' faith in the composer's inventiveness and technical adeptness.

There are three Trio Sonatas here. Number 3 in F Major seems at time to be holding back and has the most delightful, subtle melodies. Number 5 in A Minor has just as much sophistication, variety and emerges through gentle curves and swayings of sound; the opening movement has some exciting yet controlled counterpoint. And number 6 in D Minor has an almost Handelian middle movement and much uplifting yet not unserious ripieno and thrusting passages which reveal the beauty of these dedicated players' string sound. The thing you'll probably notice as you settle into the first few tracks is the sedate pace - a marked slowness of tempi. This is all to the good - for the unrushed unfolding of thematic ideas and supporting instrumentation allow the music to breathe, and every nuance to be fully audible. Indeed there is a dignity and gravitas to, for example, the F Major's gentle statement and counter-statement; they make it sound more classical than spontaneous. Yet the execution here is far from predictable or dull. Similarly the gentle, walking pace with which each of the players sets out the theme of La Folia itself has the effect, almost, of a first time hearing. Most welcome.

Elizabeth Wallfisch hits some high spots and sends shivers down the spine with her performance of the Opus 1 number 3 solo sonata in E Minor; Catherine Mackintosh similarly does opus 4 number 12 proud – though with perhaps not quite the same self-confidence as Wallfisch. So there's a pleasing array of textures, musical ideas and harmonic depth on this CD. It bears repeating that this is music originally meant for amateur, 'local' performance (and consumption). Its flavour has been suavely picked up and handled very well by these consummate professionals. The lasting impression remains of unspectacular detachment; the music is played with a generous seriousness that nevertheless never cloy nor draws attention to itself. It's stately and almost regal at times. Maybe that's chiefly because tempi are a tiny bit slower than we have become used to in intervening years. But really none the worse for that – we can savour every turn and phrase. The fact that these dozen accomplished musicians haven't thereby rendered the music in any way 'precious' must originate in their evident exuberance, and enjoyment of knowing and presenting it.

There's a genuineness and gentle familiarity in their playing that makes them superb ambassadors for what Geminiani was aiming at – and what he usually so successfully achieved: persuasive, thoughtful and accessible music of great originality and subtle beauty. Geminiani (who studied with Corelli in Rome) seems to have been a bit... 'needy' where conducting and organizing his own music was concerned; Burney put his failings down to a shaky sense of tempi! He was more adept at re-arranging (his) music when necessary – indeed it is the 1739 revision of his Opus 1 from 1716 that we hear on this CD. The musicians here play with never a hint of such shortcomings thereby lifting the music into a more refined, almost

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rarefied, sphere. But, again, this steadiness is a big plus where music of such delicacy is concerned. The liner notes are somewhat on the sparse side; the sound is more than adequate if a little closely recorded, and the quantity not all that generous at little more than 50 minutes. All in all this is a disc that can be thoroughly recommended. Listening to it carefully and with renewed attention (there's always something new at each hearing... a delayed harpsichord entry, an apposite rallentando, a striking counterplay of closing chords) will bring hours of pleasure. ---Mark Sealey

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