

Passionate Baroque Arias (2007)



1. *L'Astarto, opera: Sinfonia. Allegro* [play](#)
2. *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno, oratorio, HWV 46a: Una schiera di piaceri*
3. *Water Music Suite No.1 for orchestra in F major, HWV 348: Minuetto*
4. *Adriano in Siria, opera: Quel cor che mi donasti*
5. *Water Music Suite No.1 for orchestra in F major, HWV 348: (...)*
6. *L'Olimpiade, opera in 3 acts, RV 725: Lo seguitai felice*
7. *Concerto Grosso in G minor, Op.6/6, HWV 324: Affettuoso, Allegro ma non troppo*
8. *Concerto Grosso in B flat major, Op.3/2, HWV 313: Andante* [play](#)
9. *Arianna in Creta, opera, HWV 32: Son qual stanco pellegrino*
10. *Double Horn Concerto, for 2 horns, strings & continuo in F major, RV 538: Largo*
11. *Rodelinda, regina de' Langobardi, opera, HWV 19: Ritorna, caro dolce mio tesoro*
12. *Giulio Cesare in Egitto, opera, HWV 17: Sinfonia*
13. *Orlando finto pazzo, opera in 3 acts, RV 727: La speranza verdeggiando*
14. *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno, oratorio, HWV 46a: Tu del ciel Ministro eletto*

Gemma Bertagnoli - soprano

Ensemble Cordia

Stefano Veggetti – conductor

Soprano Gemma Bertagnoli is a mainstay of many early music recordings, but this is the first solo recital I'm aware of for her. Her voice is still shimmery, floating and passionate, with occasional lapses of breath to support the line and a tendency to shy away from the top notes, but she is never shrill and the voice has developed a greater solidity than earlier recordings. Vivaldi's "Lo seguitai felice" is superbly sung and acted, with the first section buttoned up to express the resolve to stand by a friend after some reprehensible actions, until she erupts into cascading embellishments for the repeat. "Son qual stanco pellegrino" is simple and beautiful, with the voice floating over a soft, lush orchestral palette as a cello weaves in and out. (This track is preceded by an excerpt from Handel's opus 3 concerto grosso which also features a

cello, and it's one example of how the insertion of instrumental asides and vocal numbers build on one another.) On Vivaldi's virtuoso aria "La speranza verdeggiando" from the opera Orlando Finto Pazzo, she covers all the notes energetically but tastefully and without flash. She lets the music's own momentum speak for itself. Compared to the way she handled the piece on Naive's recording of the whole opera, it is more metrical and less accented, but her tone is much thinner on the Naive set. This current version speaks to a maturity both of instrument and of interpretation.

That Naive recording also featured the prominent, loose approach of the Academia Montis Regalis under the direction of Alessandro de Marchi. On this disc the Ensemble Cordia under the direction of cellist Stefano Veggetti offers a tamer approach that is just as technically and emotionally rewarding. They provide an airy but sturdy underpinning to Bertagnoli that never covers up the voice, and on instrumental numbers they play passionately but without any exaggeration. The lively Sinfonia from one of Hasse's opera is a perfect opener, and the Affetuososo from Handel's Opus 6 #6 is tender and intimate. My only quips are Konrad Zeller's weak oboe in the other concerto grosso selection, and the obbligato violin on the last track by Handel has an overly dry tone that stretches out the sound like pulled taffy. This last track is also Bertagnoli's weakest, she is dramatically involved but her tone just disintegrates at certain points.

These are small quibbles and I'd actually give this disc 4.5 stars if possible. The mixture of arias and instrumental movements never seems like simply a "best of" variety, as the instrumental tracks introduce, comment and push along the vocal program to provide a diverse continuity. More importantly, singer and orchestra turn in attractive, nuanced interpretations of material both familiar and new (I've never heard any vocal music by Veracini). Highly recommended for period enthusiasts and admirers of passionately sung, technically demanding operatic music.
—M.Figg

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