

Giuseppe Sammartini - Concertos (2010)



1 Harpsichord Concerto in A major: *Andante spiritoso* 2 Harpsichord Concerto in A major: *Allegro assai* 3 Harpsichord Concerto in A major: *Andante* 4 Harpsichord Concerto in A major: *Allegro assai* 5 Concerto for flute and strings in D major: *Allegro* 6 Concerto for flute and strings in D major: *Siciliano* 7 Concerto for flute and strings in D major: *Vivace* 8 Concerto for flute and strings in A major: *Allegro* 9 Concerto for flute and strings in A major: *Andante* 10 Concerto for flute and strings in A major: *Allegro* 11 Oboe Concerto No. 9 in B flat major: *Allegro assai* 12 Oboe Concerto No. 9 in B flat major: *Adagio ma non tanto* 13 Oboe Concerto No. 9 in B flat major: *Tempo di Minuetto* 14 Concerto for oboe and strings, No. 12 in C major: *Allegro* 15 Concerto for oboe and strings, No. 12 in C major: *Andante* 16 Concerto for oboe and strings, No. 12 in C major: *Allegro assai* Donatella Bianchi - harpsichord, basso continuo Paolo Ferrigato – flute Francesco Quaranta - oboe I Musici Ambrosiani Paolo Suppa – conductor

The elder Sammartini, Giuseppe (1695–1750), is the featured composer on this disc. His younger brother, Giovanni Battista (1700–75), today tends to get most of the credit for the influential role he played in the development of the early Classical symphony. But Milan-born Giuseppe also made important contributions to the fledgling form. His main claim to fame during his lifetime, however, was less as a composer than as a virtuoso oboist. Only in hindsight has he been recognized for the prolific composer he was. It's believed he wrote some 450 works, including three operas, 68 symphonies, a dozen concertos, and a number of chamber works, though many have been lost and others misattributed to his brother. Like many another Italian composer and musician of his day, Sammartini followed the money trail to London in 1728, remaining there for the last 22 years of his life. There he played in the opera orchestras of Handel and Bononcini and rubbed elbows with J. C. Bach and no doubt some of his other native Italians, such as Geminiani, who had also established themselves in England.

According to the booklet note, only the four-movement harpsichord concerto on this disc has been recorded before; the other four works are claimed to be world premiere recordings. That

may have been true at the time these pieces were recorded—more on that below—but I find listed on an Atma CD (22273) what I believe is the D-Major Flute Concerto contained on the present disc, albeit played on recorder rather than transverse flute.

With regard to the A-Major Harpsichord Concerto, set aside all of your expectations as to what such a piece written by an Italian Baroque composer might sound like, for the model here is clearly Handel. Sammartini didn't spend all those years playing in the opera pit for naught. His concerto could easily pass for one of the keyboard concertos Handel wrote to be played during intermissions at performances of his oratorios. Imagine one of Handel's organ concertos transferred to harpsichord and you'll have a perfect idea of where Sammartini's concerto is coming from.

The flute concertos are almost certainly earlier works dating from Sammartini's Italian years. They are found in the same collection that contains the composer's most famous work, the Recorder Concerto in F Major. Sammartini was not a flutist, and while the two flute works here contain some lovely music, they're careful not to push the soloist too far into virtuoso territory. The contemporaneous German flutist and composer J. J. Quantz filled that void quite nicely with his more than 300 flute concertos. Sammartini's style is typical of much music of the Italian Baroque, which is to say, as one writer did, that it echoes with the eternity of the Tuscan hills.

The flute may not have been Sammartini's instrument, but the oboe was, and here we have two beautiful examples of oboe concertos in the Italian manner to augment those by Albinoni and Vivaldi. A bit closer in style to the former than the latter, Sammartini's writing is, like Albinoni's, rather more feminine and voluptuous than the more masculine and athletic Vivaldi's. Rhythmic drive is not quite as forceful and ritornellos are not quite as short and repetitive. Slow movements also tend to be more extended with almost romanticized drawing-out of the solo cantilena line. If you're familiar with Albinoni's op. 9 oboe concertos, these two Sammartini concertos from a set of 12 in London's British Library are close enough in content and style to be Albinoni sisters.

It's increasingly rare these days for recordings of 17th- and 18th-century music made within the last 10 years or so to be performed on modern instruments. But the recording at hand was made in 1998, and I Musici Ambrosiani is a modern-instrument chamber ensemble in the tradition of groups such as I Musici, I Solisti Veneti, and I Solisti di Zagreb.

A Google search turned up no information on I Musici Ambrosiani, and I found no other

recordings by the ensemble listed. Nor does the booklet note provide any background on the band, but it does name the individual players, who number a total of 14. So, while these are definitely more than one-to-a-part performances, they're not philharmonic-sized realizations. Playing is alert and stylish, and for fans of Italian Baroque-styled concertos, the music will be irresistible.

A final note on the CD itself: The booklet cover, adorned with a photo of a fruit plate filled with strawberries, orange slices, and kiwis, is emblazoned with a series designation, Delizie Musicali , and the disc itself is imprinted with a "Vol. 3." I don't know what's on Volume 2, but Volume 1, a disc of works by Biber, and Volume 4, a disc of works by Michel Pignolet de Montéclair, were also sent to me for review. Based on these three albums it would seem a safe assumption that the CDs in this Delizie Musicali series, which initially appeared (and are still available) on Dynamic's full-priced label, are now being rereleased in this mid-priced line devoted to the music of the Baroque period. ---FANFARE: Jerry Dubins

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