

Leonardo Vinci – Fileno Soprano Cantatas (2012)

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1-3 Mesta, oh Dio, fra queste selve by Leonardo Vinci *4-7 Fille, tu parti, oh Dio, chamber cantata for soprano or alto & continuo* by Alessandro Scarlatti *8-10 Mi costa tante lacrime, cantata for voice & ensemble* by Leonardo Vinci *11-14 Recorder Sonata in A minor* by Leonardo Vinci *15-18 Amor, di Citerea, cantata for voice & ensemble* by Leonardo Vinci *19-22 Parto. Ma con qual core, cantata for voice & ensemble* by Leonardo Vinci

Emanuela Galli • soprano (1-3, 8-10, 19-22) Francesca Cassinari • soprano (4-7, 15-18) Stile Galante (Ensemble): Claudia Combs • violin I Eva Saladin • violin II Anna Stegmann • recorder Gabriele Palomba • theorbo Giovanni Valgimigli • violone Andrea Friggi • harpsichord Stefano Aresi • direction

Here is a nice disc that explores the world of the chamber cantata in early 18th-century Naples by one of the city's leading lights, Leonardo Vinci (1690–1730). Vinci, trained at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo, spent his entire life in Naples, first as a private maestro di cappella to the Prince of Sansevero and subsequently, in 1725, as Alessandro Scarlatti's successor at the Cappella Royale. A favorite teacher, he trained sopranos such as Faustina Bordoni, who later became part of a power couple with her husband, Johann Adolf Hasse, in Dresden, and influenced an entire generation of composers of opera seria as well as comic works in the Neapolitan dialect, the forerunners of opera buffa.

Vinci (and no, it is not Leonardo da Vinci, although there are several discs of the music of his time two centuries earlier) is no stranger to audiophiles, since his music has appeared in a trickle since the early 1990s. The complete flute sonatas were released in 1999 on Mondo Musica, while two operas, *L'ammalato immaginario* and *Li zite 'ngalera*, appeared the same year on Opus 111; the former has been rereleased as an mp3 only this year. And even the cantatas are not unknown, since they have formed part of a number of recordings of Neapolitan music over the past two decades, and there is even a nice disc on *Naïve* done by the Cappella dei Turchini in 2007. None include these works, but enough is out there to realize that he is one of the originators of the lyrical line that marks early Italian classicism as it appears in people

such as Giovanni Pergolesi or Hasse (Handel's successor as "Il caro sassone"). It is therefore not surprising to find that these intimate pieces, often scored only for voice and continuo, are in that no-man's land between the conservative and predictable Baroque and more sensitive Neapolitan styles, in that there are features such as ostinato grounds, repetition, and sequencing of small motivic units, but also flowing lines, interesting and often unexpected harmonies, and a sensitivity to text that goes beyond mere word-painting. There is virtuosity, oh yes, but there is also attention to the details of the texts by Pietro Metastasio that involves dramatic gestures.

For example, the final cantata's first movement, "Parto, ma con qual core," allegedly written for Bordoni as a gift, opens with a powerfully emotional *mezza di voce* on the word "parto," drawing out the sentiment. Thereafter such text emphasis interrupts the recitative periodically, giving it a dramatic punch. The same can be said for the opening of the first cantata, where the word "mesta" (sorrowful or woeful) is sustained for such a length that you feel the soprano must burst into tears. Not all is entirely so maudlin, however, for Vinci includes in the common three- or four-movement sequence of his cantatas some nice displays. For example, in the fourth cantata, *Amor, di Citerea*, there are some nice florid lines to "tu spiega il mio diletto," while in the first, the final aria "In mezzo all'onde irate" is a rather trippy *furore* with rapid figuration and ornamentation. These are competently composed works that demonstrate variety and interest, from the quaint ostinato continuo of the final work's "chi m'ascolta" to abrupt *adagio* insertions into the third aria of *Mi consta tante lacrime* that interrupt the dance-like mood with emotional comments. The only interlopers are the recorder sonata, a rather plain piece that sounds very much like Telemann even down to the cute final minuet, and the cantata *Fille, tu parti?*, which diverges so drastically in terms of style and content, being a rather old-fashioned set of continuo arias, that it can hardly be by Vinci at all. In fact, it is by his predecessor, Alessandro Scarlatti, who wrote more than 600 of these things and no doubt served as Vinci's model, which explains the misattribution. One might have hoped for a couple of his other 15-odd cantatas instead.

As far as the performances go, soprano Francesca Cassinari has a light, flexible voice that handles the various florid passages with ease. She is in tune, and I find her interpretation of these occasional works quite effective. Her colleague Emanuela Galli has a darker color to her voice, almost a mezzo, and while this gives depth to the texts in her cantatas, she occasionally could be cleaner with her ornamentations. In "In mezzo all'onde irate," for instance, a vibrato creeps into passages, which seems to throw her slightly off pitch momentarily. On the other hand, her sensitive performance in the Bordoni cantata is magical, especially in the first recitative and the final aria, where she hits her stride in the rousades of "Qual ruscelletto." Stefano Aresi's group, *Stile Galante*, does a credible job, though strings are required really only in the first cantata. I find Gabriele Palomba's theorbo playing quite effective, rolling the chords in a way that seems to imitate the opening of a curtain onto the scene. In short, this is a good disc, and if you are at all interested in the late Baroque Neapolitan musical scene, it would be a good one to have in your collection. ---FANFARE: Bertil van Boer, arkivmusic.com

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