

Concerto Palatino -- Selected Reviews (translated where necessary)

Concerto Palatino – Recent Reviews:

- From a review by Roberto Verti in *Il Resto del Carlino* (Bologna, 2000)

The *Feste Musicali* presented under the title “Instrumental Polychorality” works composed for two organs and instruments, dialoguing with each other from opposite choir lofts, by the great “Venetians” Ascanio Trombetti and Giovanni Gabrieli. This is music perfect for the Basilica of San Petronio and executed with a maturity, a sound culture, and an interpretative ease which has by now attained an incredible solidity in the hands of the ensemble Concerto Palatino, an ensemble which has taken its name from the [historical] Concerto Palatino of the pontifical Bologna and which has become an international point of reference. Among all the musicians, let us cite the two splendid cornettists who are always the soul of the ensemble, Bruce Dickey and Doron Sherwin, and the organists who sustained the more than rare excellence of the group of violins and trombones, Liuwe Tamminga and Klaus Eichhorn.

- From a review by Stanislas Perreau in *Classica* (June 2000) of the CD, *Sonate e Canzoni “per concertar con l’organo”* – Harmonia mundi HMC 901688

[...] All of the timbres lead to a veritable “banquet of sounds”: seductive cornetts, imperious trombones, airy violins, and, the pinnacle of refinement, two superb organs in opposing choir lofts, glittering with a thousand flames. Totally immersed in the style appropriate to these delicate labyrinths, Concerto Palatino delivers delicious sonic bliss where the flamboyant art of improvisation triumphs: lucky Venetians who were surrounded every day with the beauty of a music so learned and so brilliant.

- From a review by Carlo Vitali in *Amadeus* January 2001 of a concert of Giovanni Gabrieli in San Petronio, Bologna:

The ensemble founded and directed by the cornettist Bruce Dickey, an American virtuoso but a naturalized Bolognese, has unearthed not only the antique name of *Concerto Palatino* and the original instruments or copies of these, but above all, a noble gypsy-like attitude which inspires his musicians to fill out the austere written pages with diminutions, passaggi and cadences of astonishing rapidity and precision, all executed with the half-smile on the lips of someone who knows what he is doing, but lets it be known that he can do much more [...] All of the pieces on the program made evident the unity and the lunar musicality of these 12 virtuosi and virtuose [...]

- From a review by Alfred Ziltener (*Basellschaftliche Zeitung*, 2003)

[...] Under the direction of Bruce Dickey and Charles Toet the ensemble Concerto Palatino, together with a hand-picked vocal ensemble, all of them specialists in historical performance practice, interpreted a program of polychoral music of Gabrieli and his musical heirs in Germany. [...] Singers and instrumentalists joined together in precisely played, organically musical tapestries of sound. Bruce Dickey and Doron David Sherwin demonstrated, in a long duet in the Magnificat of Scheidt, the level of virtuosity which can be heard today on the cornetto, an instrument which not very long ago was thought to be almost unplayable.

- From a review by Clifford Barlett in *Early Music Review* (London) of Heinrich Schütz, *Psalmen Davids*, Harmonia mundi France, with Concerto Palatino and Cantus Coelln.

The instrumental contribution from Bruce Dickey's Concerto Palatino, is breathtakingly beautiful. The shimmering sound of Mr Dickey's cornetto, as it sails over the ensemble, is one of those "absolutes" in life that one hopes will endure forever.

Given the near-definitive level of the recording and the importance of Schütz's music (and its relative neglect until now), this is a release that belongs in every music lover's library.

- From a review in the *Passauer Neue Presse*, July 7, 2003:

A major part of the overpowering overall effect [of the performance] was due to the wind players of the ensemble Concerto Palatino. The subtly nuanced sound culture and astonishing virtuosity which the Baroque trombones and cornetti let loose found a pendant and made a seamless connection to the perfect balance of sound between singers, string players and continuo.

- From a review (2201) by David Fallows in *Grammophone* of the CD, Monteverdi, *Selva morale e spirituale*, with Concerto Palatino and Cantus Coelln:

It must be said that the instrumentalists of Concerto Palatino never for a moment sound tired: from the miraculous cornetto duets of Bruce Dickey and Doron Sherwin, to the beautifully blended sackbuts, the always vivacious violins and the perfectly blended continuo group, they repeatedly add energy to the performances.

Older Reviews

Source: Diapason (France). October, 1992.

Record review: Symphoniae sacrae, Book I. Label: Accent.

Reviewer: Roger Tellart

Rating: Diapason d'or (highest prize)

It was under the tutoring, if we may call it that, of Monteverdi and of the most subjective, the most spoken sort of monody, that Schütz wrote his first book of *Symphoniae sacrae*... It is without any doubt this hyper-expressivity which was the aim of this interpretation, both superbly felt and ideally virtuosic (the insane prowess of Bruce Dickey on the cornett!), of *Concerto Palatino*, an ensemble which is truly becoming an absolute point of reference in the repertoire of the high Baroque. The near perfection of the instrumental approach is here seconded by irreproachable vocal work, both on the level of mystical spirituality (the singing full of urgent tenderness of Douglas Nasrawi in that Italian jewel *Venite ad me* where Schütz not only makes himself the supreme master of expressing the sacred text, but is also truly brought to a Catholic sensibility) and of the dramatic touch (the poignant plaint of the bass Harry van der Kamp in the funereal lament *Fili mi, Absalon* which sets to music the lament of King David on the death of his son Absalon to the sound of a formidable *sinfonia* of trombones); all of this without speaking, as was mentioned above, of the pages taken from the Song of Songs, where the spiritual decor tends to voluptuous abandon (the languid curves of *Anima mea liquefacta est*, where the two tenors John Potter and Douglas Nasrawi are simply perfect).

Perhaps, in the past, we have known certain isolated versions of these masterpieces which were more fervent or more intense (we remember the tragic dimension of Josef Greindl, legendary Wagnerian, in *Fili mi, Absalon* and *Attendite, popule meus*, outside the framework, to be sure, of Baroque style). But judged in its totality, this complete version is to be warmly celebrated because it brings together with a rare desire for formal perfection and a faithfulness to the practice of the time, the true expressive touch of which is born that emotion which goes right to the soul.

Source: Diapason (France), February, 1990.

Record Review: Il Concerto Palatino di Bologna. Label: Accent

Reviewer: Roger Tellart

Rating: 4 (scale of 1 to 4)

It is as a rival to the superb concert of Hesperion XX--recently reissued on CD--that this recording is poised, a recording which in homage to the rich repertoire of music for cornetts and trombones of northern Italy from the end of the 16th century to about 1650, offers a program close to the anthology of Jordi Savall, but without any overlapping. The name of this group alone, in which Flemish and British (sic!) instrumentalists dominate, is symbolic, since it is taken from the historical ensemble "Il Concerto Palatino de la Signoria" of Bologna, which, for two centuries was the musical glory of the Emilian city, home of the famous "Accademia die Filomusi."

...In this opulent realization, the polychoral dimension of these works, with its echo play and replies, is perhaps less evident than in the recording of Hesperion XX. Savall and his colleagues (among them shone already the infallible Bruce Dickey on the cornett and Wim Becu on trombone) endeavored above all to make use of the sonic and spiritual space, imagining what this festive music might have been at the time of the composers under the domes of St. Mark's...

From a slightly different perspective--the setting being not that of St. Mark's but of the cathedral of San Petronio in Bologna--the super-technicians of Concerto Palatino set out, above all, to unravel in the pages which they bring to light, "all of the threads in the complex musical fabric of the early Baroque." This accounts for the presence of the *motetti passeggiati* (that is, ornamented motets) taken from the treatise of Giovanni Bassano and borrowed from traditional composers such as Palestrina (we note the fabulous technical perfection of *Benedicta sit sancta trinitas*, where Bruce Dickey pulverizes the norms of transcendent virtuosity).

Thus it is not a question of choosing between these two albums but of acquiring both of them, since they complement each other perfectly, to the joy of all.

Source: Répertoire (France). September, 1992

Record Review: Symphoniae sacrae, Book I. Label: Accent.

Reviewer: Francis Albou

Rating: 8 (on scale 1-9)

The ensemble Concerto Palatino has perfectly seized the concerted character of the style, where voices and instruments dialogue as equal partners. It is here that the principle difference is to be found with the version--nearly complete--of the Saqueboutiers de Toulouse (1985) in which the instrumental material is more discrete, also more fragile. There is nothing like that here. The cornetts play with brilliance, deploying a magnificent technical agility. The sun, the seductions of Italy invest the recording. The anxiety, the suffering of the future collections of 1647 and 1650 are barely to be perceived. The six soloists immerse themselves perfectly in this repertoire which they seem to master totally. The technique is marvelous and the diction excellent. One appreciates the open sonorities of the vowels which permit a perfect comprehension of the text. The two solo tenors, with particularly bright sounds, have nothing to envy in the prestigious duo Elwes-de Mey of the Erato recording.

Source: L'Instant (France). June 25, 1992.

Record Review: Symphoniae sacrae, Book I. Label: Accent.

Venetian Splendors

...Under the direction of Bruce Dickey (who himself plays the cornett) the ensemble Concerto Palatino gives these works an interpretation which is absolutely delectable and high in color. To be tasted like a *gourmandise*.

Source: Il Giornale della Musica (Italy). March 1991.

Review of 2 CD's: Il Concerto Palatino di Bologna and

Sonate Concertate: Virtuoso instrumental music of Castello and Scarani. Label: Accent

Reviewer: Roberto Verti

[Quotation of notes from record jacket]

... Thus Bruce Dickey, cornettist of great renown in our day, summarizes the background upon which arose, in the dawning days of Bolognese musical culture, the international fame of the Concerto Palatino di Bologna, to which, with the declared objective of reconstructing its sound, is dedicated the name of this ensemble, protagonist of two excellent compact disks for the label Accent. In the first, dedicated to the historic Bolognese ensemble, the group of cornetts, trombones, organ and chitarrone, led by Dickey and Charles Toet offers a precious tour of the musical literature of Northern Italy from 1580 to 1650; in the second more recent one, the names of Dario Castello and Giuseppe Scarani dominate in an intriguing and richly fascinating portrait of instrumental virtuosity of the early 17th century.

It must be said immediately that these two releases from Accent are recommended to any lover of the new compact disc format, and not only to those, more and more numerous these days, who are primarily interested in music from before the birth of Mozart. The formidable musical quality of the Concerto Palatino abundantly surpasses the limits of musical "authenticists" and imposes itself as an absolute value, capable, thanks to a stupefying technical perfection (try to play a cornett or a Renaissance trombone to believe it), of making evident the musical value--particularly high in the case of the CD dedicated to Castello and Scarani--of this music, which here is given back its authentic (as far as we can know it today) stylistic dimension.

Concert Review: Berlin Bach-Tage; August, 1992

Source: Alte Musik Aktuell, 1992

Reviewer: Hans-Joachim Diessner

The opening concert with Concerto Palatino and vocal soloists contained only one piece from Bach himself (BMV 64), the others being by his contemporaries Kuhnau, Pezel and Reiche as well as by Palestrina--in this case Bach's arrangement of Palestrina's Missa sine nomine, a convincing example of Bach's ties to tradition. The second concert with this ensemble comprised vocal pieces of Heinrich Schütz from his *Symphoniae sacrae* 1-3 and instrumental pieces by Gabrieli, Buonamente, and Picchi. About Concerto Palatino, also in these two concerts heard in a brilliant formation under the direction of Bruce Dickey and Charles Toet, we need not waste many words. The vocal ensemble left no wishes unfulfilled in the interpretation of the sacred works. The instrumentalists, in the canzonas for five and six parts, achieved, through an interpretation which was both full of emotion and always in tune, an optimal musical effect.

Source: Classic CD (Great Britain); August 28, 1992

Record Review: Symphoniae sacrae, Book I. Label: Accent.

Reviewer: Paul Riley

Rating: 5 stars

If nothing by Schütz had come down to us save for the *Symphoniae sacrae* (published in 1629 after his second visit to Venice) he would still have to be regarded as one of the towering figures of his age. The 20 exquisite biblical miniatures, a sort of musical equivalent to the prayer cards slipped into the pages of a Missal as an aid to devotion and source of uplift, have a quality of immense intimacy born of simple means manipulated with consummate sophistication.

Each has its own distinct sound--drawn from pungent cornetti, fruity curtals and a quartet of trombones which can be grief-laden (*Fili mi, Absalom*) or magisterial (*Attendite popule meus*): Schütz's genius is in his seductive scoring. The melting combination of a couple of tenors and cornetto muto for *Anima mea liquifacta est* is ravishing, but then again all the settings based on the Song of Solomon have an erotic charge which is given just the right degree of latitude on this superb new recording.

The singers are excellent--with Barbara Borden and John Potter outstanding, but bass Harry van der Kamp is a bit too pleasantly anonymous in his extended solos. The playing is unfailingly delectable. If Schütz has passed you by invest in this and prepare for instant conversion.

Concert Review of Cavalli Vespers in Herne, November 1994:

“...the performance must be described as superb in every way. The instrumentalists of Concerto Palatino, led by the virtuoso cornettists Bruce Dickey and Doron David Sherwin [...] demonstrated virtuoso brilliance...

Ingo Dorf Müller in *Concerto*

Record Review of Cavalli Vespers CD

Source: Gramophone, April 1996.

Reviewer: Ian Fenlon

[...] Comparisons with Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610 are inevitable (he was, after all, Cavalli's teacher for a quarter of a century), and there can hardly be any doubt that Cavalli knew the older work (a debt discreetly acknowledged by direct quotation in "Laetatus sum"). The most important legacies are the traditional alternation style of psalm setting (here recast in a more modern idiom), common throughout north Italy but particularly associated with Venice, and the richness of the instrumental and vocal palette. As Bruce Dickey's informative notes explain, there are no indications in the *Musiche sacre* itself that cornetts are to be used: his decision to use them here to double the soprano lines in the tutti sections and occasionally to substitute for the violins on obbligato lines seems entirely justified both in terms of artistic results and also what is known of Venetian practice at this time. The effect, faultless and majestic as ever (Dickey surely remains without peer among cornettists), is well matched by some beautifully elegant string-playing, shown off to particularly good advantage not only in the Vespers sequence itself but also in a number of canzonas and sonatas that have been inserted, following contemporary practice, as antiphon substitutes.

The overall effect is both stunning and revelatory, an authoritative reminder of the quality of Cavalli's sacred music, so often overlooked in favour of his work for the stage. This is a major recording achievement, sensitively realized in a warmly resonant acoustic that could almost be St Mark's Basilica itself.

Record Review of Cavalli Vespers CD

Source: Continuo, April 1996

What we have here is an absolutely stunning release of music of an unjustly neglected composer. The name of Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676), the most important 17th century Venetian composer after Monteverdi, nowadays is of significance only to a handful of specialists, but in his own day he was perhaps the most celebrated composer in all Europe [...] Praise be to Bruce Dickey for researching, editing and bringing this wonderful music to light!

I was particularly taken by the singing on these discs. Eight soloists do the honors, and they are all of exceedingly high quality. I would have to single out the amazingly full-throated male alto of Rodrigo del Pozo (why can't countertenors all sound like this?), and the ubiquitous Harry van der Kamp, who sings with great style and panache. Bruce Dickey, the world's leading performer on the cornett, lends his extraordinary tonal, technical and expressive abilities to the proceedings, and he is backed by an exceptional group of trombones, strings, and keyboards. The recorded sound is spacious and atmospheric, and Mr Dickey's liner notes are exhaustive in their coverage of the subject. Full texts and translations are also provided.

Urgently recommended.