

Folias and Fantasias • Cavatina Duo • BRIDGE 9541 (70:44)

MARAIS *Folies d'Espagne*. TELEMANN Twelve Fantasias TWV 40:2-13

The Cavatina Duo, consisting of flautist Eugenia Moliner and guitarist Denis Azabagic, has done a number of recordings of arrangements that are, to say the least, quite unconventional. Their repertoire is always eclectic and reflects their own backgrounds in Spain and Bosnia. In a day of performances by thoroughly modern editions or period performances, their duo of flute and guitar stands out as an alternative, one that approaches works in a new and rather interesting way. In preparation for reviewing this disc, I checked out their recording of Astor Piazzolla's music, also on Bridge, and my ears were pleasantly surprised by the fluidity and musicality of their playing. Here, they have turned their attention to the Baroque, with Marin Marais's lengthy and kaleidoscopic set of variations entitled *Folies d'Espagne*. This was composed for viol, Marais's personal instrument around 1700; it was published in second book of pieces for viol and figured bass the following year. For some reason, the original Spanish dance appeared around the beginning of the 16th century or perhaps a bit earlier, and by the end of the 17th it had somehow risen to an international piece, joining other ostinato variation forms such as the passacaglia and chaconne as a model. The actual harmonic foundation for this may owe its present form to Jean-Baptiste Lully, and certainly this French set of variations probably followed his practice.

In any case, it has the form of a slow initial sarabande, but the variations themselves are increasing in complexity. Here the continuo part seems quite in tune with the Spanish origins, even if some of the realization does reduce the part to a more idiomatic style deliberately. The original viol is not to be taken to literally, for Marais was perfectly happy to have any instrument available take on the upper part. The flute certainly fits the bill quite nicely. The lyrical moments seem to float, while the more tortuous passages flutter and dance. Much of this, of course, is due to the nicely sensitive playing of Moliner, and the easy accompaniment of Azabagic. They have turned this French piece into a sprightly Spanish flavored delight; this is apparent particularly in the superb tonguing that is required as the variations reach their peak.

In the case of the 12 Fantasias by Georg Philipp Telemann, the originals were intended for solo flauto traverso. These were composed sometime before their publication in 1730 (TWV 40:2-13), but originally conceived as part of a series of fantasias for various solo instruments, ranging from harpsichord (or clavichord) to the viola da gamba. These appeared subsequently over the course of half a decade and represent perhaps Telemann's curiosity with the genre. Unlike Bach, whose solo pieces tend to be arranged in suites, Telemann, his friend, chose a set of more improvisatory works. The originals were intended to embed the harmonies in the flute line, but here Alan Thomas has provided a sort of "continuo" accompaniment for the guitar, which functions more as a duo than support. The result is a reimagining of the works that I believe would have tickled the composer (as well as impressing him, but this is of course speculative).

These pieces run the gamut of keys, though he does not venture beyond the four sharps (in Fantasia 10 in E major). He set out to impress people right from the first piece, where the opening is a monophonic fugue, as odd as this may seem. There is a brief slow portion, and then what sound very much like a triple meter *alla polacca* rhythmically and

melodically ensues. One does have favorites, both from the performer standpoint and that of the listener. Where these come together is in the third fantasia in B minor, where the solemn slow introduction quickly expands into a fugal exposition, and then retreats, as if depicting a flighty and contrary character; it ends with a rather fluid gigue. Another favorite of mine is the ninth fantasia in E major, where the sharpness of the key is emphasized right at the beginning by registral leaps, though maintaining a steady pace, before running into a perpetual motion Allegro and then after a few solemn notes there is a section that seem taken right out of an opera in its lyrical vein. The following F-sharp minor fantasia continues the operatic style though the flute is more freely moving according to the wandering line. The faster portions skip and leap, but with a slightly darker tone to the music.

There is much, much more to this disc, and I've but only hit a few highlights. The playing is fluid, well-balanced, and precise by the duo. The nimbleness of Moliner is matched by her easy and clear playing, making each work speak with excellent clarity. The guitar of Azabagic is the perfect partner, and here one finds a match in terms of style and tone that allows the music to come alive. Purists may quibble about the modern instruments and the artificiality of Thomas's added accompaniment in the Telemann, but I find neither of these any issue. The liveliness of the playing, the reimagining of the fantasies in a way that brings new light to the pieces, and the wholistic interaction between such outstanding performers makes this a disc that is sure to delight everyone who hears it. **Bertil van Boer**

5 stars: excellent playing and new light on reimagining the Baroque originals; it is hard to find two better and more copesetic players than Moliner and Azabagic.