

REVIEWS: (cont.)

struck, or sung. (Developing a substantial repertoire for guitar and wind instruments is still a work in progress, but adventurous composers are exploring that as well.) These collaborations afford us an avenue into many potential audiences with whom we can share our work. Furthermore, the insights we gain from working with musicians of different sorts can also enrich how we make music in our own milieu, among fellow guitarists. It is my hope that the recent works heard on these recordings will stimulate both performers and composers of the guitar world to perceive our instrument in a new light and enjoy even more of its magnificent wealth of tones and timbres.

—NATHAN CORNELIUS

CD Review:

Alfabeto falso: Vallerotondo, Simone, with I Bassifondi. Arcana A435, 2017. 1 CD.



Everything Old, New Again

Simone Vallerotondo, the Italian theorbist and Baroque guitar specialist, is so persuaded of the need to present solo guitar and lute music in ensemble performance that he created the ensemble I Bassifondi expressly for that purpose. The result is a new CD entitled *Alfabeto falso*, in reference to the dissonant chords included by early Baroque guitarists in their collections of strummed guitar solos and accompaniments. This style took first Italy, then northern Europe, by storm in the early-to-mid 17th century. He argues his case convincingly from documentary and iconographic evidence in the well-written notes to the album, which also include a bibliography of sources and an interview with Baroque violinist Enrico Onofri on the topic of bringing fresh performance approaches to audiences. But the real proof is in the playing, and here, with the help of Gabriele Miracle on percussion and Josep Maria Marti Duran on the bass *colascione* (a long-necked folk lute of Middle Eastern origin), Vallerotondo's treatment succeeds admirably, allowing these pieces to trade their antiquarian charm for a gritty and compelling immediacy that reaches across the centuries and feels as new as tomorrow.

The CD includes music for the strummed Baroque guitar by dominant figures like Foscari, Santiago de Murcia, and Corbetta, as well as the lesser-known Carbonchi, Valdambrini, and Bartolotti. Foscari opens the disc with three pieces. *Toccata detta l'innamorata* is a short prelude, played in a very free, dramatic style. *Gagliarda Francese* is a rowdy, rollicking dance with lively cross-rhythms, and makes a good contrast to the first. Vallerotondo's *rasgueado* in the outer sections seems the equal of any flamenco player, and his *punteado* solo in

the middle verse is equally fiery. *Passacaglio per la O* is a moderate, minor-key dance in *sarabande* rhythm.

The Italian guitarist Corbetta did more than anyone to establish the Baroque guitar in French court circles. Like Carbonchi, Bartolotti, and Valdambrini, Corbetta's more extended harmonic palette caused him to put aside the *alfabeto falso* notation and write out his dissonant chords note-by-note. His *Passacaglia per la X* is presented solo, with no accompanying bass or percussion.

Carbonchi was particularly experimental as a guitar composer, publishing a series of 32 pieces for an ensemble of 12 guitars, all tuned differently. His *Scaramanzie* (*superstitions* in Italian) is a hard-driving, rhythmically furious piece with a distinctively melodic bassline. A flexible approach to the piece provides space for a guitar solo, followed by a percussion solo, before the *colascione* shepherds the players to a satisfying finish. Bartolotti was another innovator; he published a cycle of *passacaglie* in his first book in all major and minor keys, more than 80 years before Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The *Passacaglia per la D* on this recording is from his second book. It builds to a compelling climax with mode mixture and syncopation. At the very end of the piece, in perhaps the most daring gesture on the album, a single altered chord bridges the tonality of Bartolotti's *Passacaglia* with the one by Corbetta that follows, connecting them into a single, two-part statement. For me the effect was unconvincing, but I salute the artists' courage.

Valdambrini's *Capona* is from his collection of 1646. Based on a short, repeating harmonic pattern, it begins with a highly syncopated and very tonal chord progression that would not sound out of place in a late-20th-century pop song.

Though he is not known to have travelled there himself, Santiago de Murcia's music is in large part known through New World sources, including two manuscripts discovered in Mexico and one in Chile. *Folias Gallegas* is a setting of a Galician folk dance, not the more common *folias* ground bass we are accustomed to. *Cumbées* is a light dance with a fluctuating meter like that of the *canarios*. *Los Impossibles* is accompanied, improbably but effectively, by a wooden xylophone.

Not all of the music comes from *alfabeto* sources. The well-known German-Italian lute virtuoso and composer Kapsberger is represented by five tracks, more than any other composer. Connections to popular culture are, if anything, even more prominent here. *Sfessania* is a *passacaglia* which has been linked by Nino Pirotta to the *commedia dell'arte*, and the version here plays up the edgy street-music feel. The following track, *Passacaglia*, seems to be a pastiche of the five thematically-related *passacaglie* in

Kapsberger's *Libro IV. Kapsberger*, the piece to which the composer gave his own name, is a rhythmically angular dance based on six statements of a ground bass saturated with hemiola. Miracle's tambourine plays a mischievous role, sometimes corroborating the notated barlines and sometimes the audible hemiola. I was reminded of a French *Courante* that ran away from home to live on the streets of Naples. *Corrente VII* is a smoothly-flowing composition of modest proportions, but it contains a distinctive descending chromatic motive that strangely echoes a cadential cliché in Dixieland jazz. *Colascione* is a widely recorded work that evokes the character of the instrument it is named after. Harmonizing its melodic material in fifths and octaves, in apparent portrayal of a contemporary folk practice, it evokes the "power chords" of rock guitarists in the 1960s. The presence of an actual *colascione* in the texture makes the folk flavor more real, and the presence of this piece on the record reminds us of the overlap between the worlds of popular and art music, an overlap fluently navigated by the guitar and its cousins.

The lutenist Piccinini claimed to have invented the archlute and objected strenuously to the practice of calling it a *liuto attiorbato*. He is represented here by three theorbo pieces of his own: an extended *Toccata cromatica*, followed by *Partite sopra l'aria francese detta l'alemanna* and *Corrente VI sopra l'alemanna*. The first is a dreamlike prelude paired with a brief fugue; the second two are based on the French tune *Une jeune fillette*.

Alfabeto falso is a highly successful re-imagining of Baroque guitar performance, informed—but not limited—by solid historical scholarship. It might not appeal to purists, but open-minded listeners will find it compelling and fresh.

—ELLWOOD COLAHAN

CD Review:

***François Campion: Music for Baroque Guitar*. Hofstötter, Bernhard. Brilliant Classics 95275, 2017. 1 CD.**



Campion as Seldom Heard

Bernhard Hofstötter's CD, *François Campion: Music for Baroque Guitar* joins a select company of recordings devoted to Campion's music performed on the Baroque guitar. This is not the 16th-century English lutenist Thomas Campion, by the way, but rather the late 17th- and early 18th-century guitarist, theorist, and theorist sometimes viewed as the heir apparent to Robert de Visée. The previous recordings of the five-course Baroque guitar concentrating on Campion's music are Michel Amoric's *Nouvelles découvertes sur la*

guitare (Arion ARN 38750, 1984) and Eric Bellocq's *François Campion: a Portrait* (Frame 244, 2003).

Campion's *Nouvelles découvertes sur la guitare* [sic] of 1705 was the last major French publication for the five-course Baroque instrument. In it he explores dance forms in loosely structured suites corresponding to different *scordatura* tunings as well as standard tuning. Hofstötter's recording focuses on Campion's own personal copy of his collection, into which the composer continued to copy numerous new compositions throughout his life. His nephew presented the volume to the royal library on the composer's death in 1747, and it now resides in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. It is the pieces Campion added later that form the focus of this recording.

Hofstötter's approach is characterized by relative stylistic purity and fidelity to Campion's text. There is nothing experimental here, but his excellent command of the instrument and the style brings the pieces to life, while still evoking the "otherness" of a long-vanished musical culture. He deploys ornamentation liberally, with an ease and grace that embellish the written notes without obscuring them. He uses *inégaes* generously and with sophistication: His rhythms are neither dotted nor triplet, just ... unequal. He plays often with a more pronounced rubato than one is accustomed to hear in Baroque music, but why not? Music as darkly emotive as this would seem to call for all the tools at the player's command.

Next to the styles heard on the two recordings mentioned earlier, Hofstötter's playing is more sustained and legato. Unlike Amoric, he mixes *punteado* and *rasgueado* textures more fluidly. He also solves the tuning challenges of the instrument, with its double courses tuned in unisons and octaves, more successfully. Amoric's texture is sometimes more transparent with regard to voice-leading, however. Hofstötter's recording almost suffers from excessive resonance, with an especially full, dark timbre, which sometimes sacrifices clarity. Bellocq's recording is also sustained and legato, but a little less resonant than Hofstötter's. Bellocq plays with a more percussive attack and uses a more aggressive rhythmic approach; his instrument emphasizes the treble side more, all of which might be appropriate for this repertoire. However I found myself convinced by the rich, smooth, and dark sound world created by Hofstötter. He himself, in the notes to the recording, gives much of the credit to his instrument, a restored Baroque guitar dating back to around 1640, even older than the music he is playing.

The added pieces in the Campion copy of *Nouvelles découvertes* tend to be more abstract, and are in many cases significantly more extended and developed than the pieces printed in the book. The longest is a *Passacaille*, which