CD Review
Bertil van Beer

Imagine the look of complete surprise and confusion when I tell a class in 18th-century music that they are now going to hear the music of Frank Zappa. That would hardly be the name one might conjure up in this context, and a certain amount of laughter and incredulity would probably be the order of the day. Yet anyone expecting some sort of 20th-century parody would be surprised by the fact that, yes, Virginia, there is a 18th-century symphony by Zappa, and, yes, he did write symphonies for the court of Marie Antoinette in the Netherlands. In this world premiere recording, two of the surviving symphonies of Francesco Zappa (fl. 1763–88) are performed by the New Dutch Academy, a new period instrument group that is sponsored by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and is dedicated to the resurrection of the 18th-century musical heritage. Zappa, who functioned at the court in The Hague for over twenty years as a cellist and teacher, was one of a venerable list of brilliant musicians and composers who flourished at this court. He, like his colleagues Giovanni Battista Zingoni (1727–11) and Francesco Pasquale Ricci (1732–1817), was hired from abroad, where he received his early training. Although little is written about his life, he was able to carve out a substantial reputation both for his playing technique (second in some reviews only to Giacchino) and his pleasant and accessible compositions. The two symphonies recorded on this disc are thoroughly steeped in the Italian style, and in both middle movements the obligato cello is featured, not surprisingly. The music is fluid and bright, the compositions well-written, though not particularly progressive. There are enough Mannheim devices to demonstrate that Zappa was certainly aware of the music of his more famous colleagues to the south. Clearly, the disc was meant to premiere Zappa’s music, but research into his works seems not to have been enough to provide for a complete disc. The NDA therefore has chosen to contrast the two symphonies with works by three of his German colleagues at The Hague, Friedrich Schwindl (1737–86) and Christian Ernst Graaf (1723–1804). Both of these men were violinists and published regularly with Hummel in Amsterdam. Their works make for a lot of D major, but are more straightforward in that Mannheim vein. Good contrasting themes in the former’s first movement, as well as nice orchestral touches make for competent works that would stand beside any other composer on the continent. For example, boisterous hammerstrokes of the latter’s D major symphony make for a splendidly brilliant effect. To top things off (and perhaps in case the Zappa connection fails to work) the disc also includes two standards, a Stamitz symphony and the Mozart KV 22 written especially for The Hague during a visit in 1765. An additional bit is the aria Conservati fede, also written the same year.

The New Dutch Academy performs these works with precision and enthusiasm. The tempos tend a bit towards the fast side, though this is not by itself unusual for such ensembles and certainly gives the recording a great deal of energy. The only real quibble I have is that the horns are in the wrong octave in KV 22 (and, yes, I know this is controversial, but there it is), and the winds in the Zappa tend to be more subdued than they seem. Still, if you want to amaze and confound students, as well as hear some great Dutch 18th-century symphonies, this disc is recommended.

New Editions
The Music of the Count of St. Germain: An Edition
Ilias Chrissohoidis
The Count of St. Germain (?–1784) is the most enigmatic of Handel’s contemporaries. It is generally assumed he was a member of the exiled Rakoczy family. First appearing under this title in the early-1740s, he moved around Europe, acquiring the confidence and admiration of Louis XV and Madame Pompadour, the Prince of Wales, and the Prince of Hesse-Cassel. Contemporary descriptions of his talents penned by Horace Walpole, Voltaire, and Canova, range from astonishment to ridicule and spite. Among his unofficial diplomatic missions, the one for the rapprochement of France and England in 1760, at the height of the Seven Years’ War, is well documented.

Musicological interest in St. Germain centers on his years in Britain (mid-1740s), where he acquired fame for his performances, especially on the violin, and his compositions. Charles Burney identified St. Germain as a leading spirit in London’s private music concerts and confirms the popularity of his Italian arias. We are fortunate to be able to verify these claims in a small though
highly original body of works, including a collection of over forty Italian arias, seven solos for the violin, six trio sonatas, and several English songs.

Highly intelligent and often endearing, the music of the Count of St. Germain deserves both publication and performance. Having acquired copies of all his extant works from several US libraries (Library of Congress, Folger, Houghton) and now from the British Library, I am preparing to submit a proposal for a 2-volume edition of his music:

Vol. 1: Italian arias. Musique raisonnée selon le bon sens, aux Dames Anglaises qui aiment le vrai gout en cet art (1750); Favourite Songs in the Opera called L'Inventanza Delussa (1747) (3 arias contributed by SG).

Vol. 2: Instrumental music and English songs. Six Sonatas for two violins with a bass for harpsichord or violoncello (1750); Seven Solos for a Violin (1758); English Songs (1747-50).

There is an effort to perform and podcast representative works of his through the Chamber Music Club concert series at University College London.

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