

Wilson's explorations of 16th-century Italian repertory (on several Naxos CDs) and Jacob Heringman's characterful selections from the Siena lute book (Avie AV0036). Thankfully, due to sheer size of the musical sources represented, there is very little direct overlap between these recordings, so this is a good investment if your palette and shelf space can accommodate plenty of 16th-century material. But if your interest in the Italian cinquecento is a fleeting one, you may find other more colourful collections of comparable repertory (and longer ones too—this disc lasts just over 45 minutes . . .) vying for your attention and hard-earned cash.

Michael Gale

*Arcadia: Italienische Lautenmusik der Hochrenaissance*, Christoph Greuter (lute), Narrenschiff CD NAR2020146.

This is the latest release from Swiss lutenist Christoph Greuter who, according to the accompanying biographical note, boasts a fascinatingly diverse musical background. Besides impressive credentials as a lutenist, Greuter is active as a jazz guitarist and across various folk traditions, most notably as an exponent of the 'bottleneck' slide guitar. This information set my mind racing as I imagined a collision (or perhaps collusion) of these traditions here, anticipating something rhapsodic, perhaps rather percussive, and certainly full of improvisatory élan.

As it happens, I was wrong—but not necessarily disappointed. Greuter plays with an elegant restraint that is very well suited to the contrapuntal forms (mostly *ricercari* and *fantasias*) which make up two-thirds of this programme. He explores Italian solo repertory from the middle third of the 16th century—only a single piece, from the Capirola lute book, is older—including six items from the important tablatures in the Bavarian State Library, Munich and five from the Siena lute book. Several Italian printed anthologies of the 1530s and 40s are represented too; highlights include three *ricercari* by Francesco di Milano which form the centrepiece of this programme, all executed with a taut gravitas which works very well for this repertory.

However, if there is a downside to Greuter's rather sober approach, it is that the dance-based pieces on the disc feel rather understated as a result. For example, his reading of Pietro Paulo Borrono's 'Saltarello chiamato el Mazolo' seems a little flat, especially when compared with the energetic version which concludes Paul O'Dette's 1994 anthology *Dolcissima et Amorosa* (Harmonia Mundi HMU907043). Greuter's choice of dance movements doesn't always help either—for instance, neither of the pieces from Munich MS 1511b within the opening sequence of the disc (tracks 2 and 4) do much to inspire, offering plenty of routine passagework but not much musical invention.

Like many listeners, I am always glad to see the inclusion of references to the musical sources employed, but the abbreviated titles used here can be rather misleading. For instance, the rubric '*Intabolatura de Lauto . . . Libro primo* (Venetia 1546)', attached to two pieces by Antonio Rotta and two by Giovanni Maria da Crema, obscures the fact that these are actually taken from two separate single-author anthologies (published in the same city and year). And when recording anonymous works with generic titles from a source as extensive as the Siena lute book, it would be useful to have page/folio references too!

Nevertheless, this is an enjoyable and well-executed disc and, for an overall snapshot of this repertory, it is certainly worth acquiring. But it is also up against some stiff competition, including Christopher

*Sprezzatura*, Christoph Greuter, Lute, Narrenschiff 2020147

Any newcomer to the lute, either listener or player, would be well advised to pay a visit to the lute music of the early Italian renaissance. It is in the first part of the 16th century that we find the first examples of printed music by the trail-blazing Ottaviano Petrucci. Petrucci published a range of musical genres including six volumes of lute music in this newly forming Humanist age.

Swiss-born musician Christoph Greuter has chosen a selection of lute pieces from this period for his CD simply titled *Sprezzatura*. The term *sprezzatura* has no direct translation but the gist of it is 'a passionate performance with the appearance of being effortless and without show.' This music is often quite improvisational in style and may require some 'effortless' attention to detail in order to bring out the musicality within. The *recercar* was a particularly popular form during the first half the 16th century and the name may be translated as meaning, 'to seek out.' Greuter originally studied jazz and blues guitar at a jazz school in Zurich later moving to lute at the renowned Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. A grounding in jazz is probably very useful when seeking out the special qualities to be found in this early Italian lute music.

The CD contains 18 anonymous pieces of the total of 27, which is a little surprising as there is a large repertoire of music by well-regarded composers from which he could have chosen. However, that is not to say that there aren't many fine pieces lacking attribution. The recording opens with a number of short anonymous pieces each one in a different form, including a pavan and saltarello followed by a *recercar*. I think this is a thoughtful approach to programming, as it demonstrates both the variety of composition style and the range of lute playing. His playing is clean and clear throughout the whole CD with tempos that well suit the music.

The first piece by a named composer comes at track 11 and it's a good one. 'Recercar Primo' by Vincenzo Capirola is something Christoph can get his teeth into. It is well played and beautifully illustrates that there is some very fine music amongst this early lute repertoire. There are also three pieces by Marco dall'Aquila.

Another piece very worthy of mention is the anonymous 'Recercata Bella'. Here is another example of a piece that is so much more than what is simply written on the page. Greuter uses precisely the right amount of rubato in the opening ten bars and goes on to find exactly what makes this piece so 'bella.'

This recording employs a great choice of music to represent how fine the 6-course lute repertoire can sound. Though it is a million miles away from the music of the English golden age, it has, nevertheless, a great charm and would make an excellent listen for any newcomer to the world of lute music.

Tony Scheuregger