



but the option to read them up an octave was always a viable one, given that the instrumental bass, together with contrabass reinforcement, would remain at pitch and thus eliminate any unwelcome chord inversions ('Tenors and Bases at the Venetian Ospedali', *Acta Musicologica* 66 (1994), 123–138). It would have been helpful to know how Priam's bass-clef aria is notated in all extant copies – or even just the eight sources that Berger has used as the basis for comparison. For instance, it would have further supported Berger's view if she had mentioned that certainly in one copy (the source that is in fact her *codex optimus*), this particular aria is marked first with an alto clef, but is immediately followed by a bass clef (I-Nc, MS 187). This may lend weight to the symbolic bass-clef argument, though it may simply have been the case that the copyist had already marked up the alto clef on 'autopilot', before realizing that this was actually a bass aria.

It is interesting to note that in the 2010 recording of this cantata, Kai Wessel explores other possibilities, some already raised by Timms in his mission to find his own performance solution (Kai Wessel/David Blunden, notes to *Benedetto Marcello, Cassandra* (Aeon: AECD 1087, 2010)). Wessel suggests that Marcello, given the performing forces available to him, may have revised his original idea of having one voice perform the entire cantata, bringing in a bass for that one aria. He also explores the idea that the bass aria could be performed up the octave, but then proposes that the reverse was also possible (taking the recitatives down an octave, to be performed by a lower voice throughout). Berger does note that Charles Burney heard *Cassandra* performed in 1770 by a 'very good base voice', which might support this hypothesis (x). But Wessel questions whether the bass singers of the time were in such command of their falsetto register that they could have taken on the entire cantata, relying on the chest and head registers to enable them to produce the required range. Timms, on the other hand, suggests that the use of a bass for a mere sixteen bars out of 866 was unlikely and that 'furthermore, since Marcello specifically asked Conti for a text for solo voice it would have been discourteous of him, to say the least, to set it for two' ('The "Cassandra" Cantata of Conti and Marcello', 128). Again, it would have been helpful to have broadened the discussion on this particular aspect of performance.

In practical terms, the score is well laid out, with generous spacing, making it visually attractive and easy to read. From the overwrought emotional vocal part that has the listeners hanging by a thread, to the intricate virtuosic continuo writing that meshes with and supports the voice so beautifully, from the complex harmonic language to the open-ended conclusion in the dominant, and to the words 'and Troy reduced to dust', there is much to be admired and explored in this stunning composition. Berger and A-R editions are to be complimented on making this mercurial work readily accessible.

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## RECORDINGS

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THOMAS AUGUSTINE ARNE (1710–1778), JOHANN CHRISTIAN BACH (1735–1782), JOHN BLOW (1648/1649–1708), JEREMIAH CLARKE (c1674–1707), WILLIAM CROFT (1677/1678–1727), MAURICE GREENE (1696–1755), RICHARD JONES (unknown–1744)

*THE PLEASURES OF THE IMAGINATION*

Sophie Yates (harpsichord)

Chandos o814, 2016; one disc, 75 minutes

With *The Pleasures of the Imagination* harpsichordist Sophie Yates offers, according to her own liner notes, 'an overview of English keyboard music during the course of the eighteenth century' (9). The recording, even at a generous seventy-five minutes long, cannot make claims to encyclopedic coverage. There are chronological



gaps, with music from the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries followed by pieces from the 1730s, 1750s and 1770s. There is also no music by Handel or Purcell; given these musicians' omnipresence during the century, some listeners may gripe that the picture presented here is a bit distorted. Yet neither of these composers is really absent at all: the disc takes us from Purcell's own orbit, with music by John Blow, to works produced a decade after Handel's death, and Purcellian and Handelian influence can be felt in nearly every piece on the disc. What Yates has presented is an effective and diverse recital programme that translates nicely onto a recording, played with impressive technical mastery and sensitive interpretive grace.

Yates uses two harpsichords, both by English builder Andrew Garlick – although anything 'English' about the instruments ends there. For pieces with an older aesthetic, Yates employs a copy of the 1681 instrument by Jean-Antoine Vaudry. For the music of 1750 and beyond, she uses a copy of a 1748 harpsichord by the Parisian builder Goujon. The brighter tone and more sustaining treble of this instrument well suit the more melodic later repertoire. The older instrument is tuned in Werckmeister 3; one wonders why Yates didn't opt for meantone, which would have been more characteristic of English tuning practices, and could have lent additional colour to her already expressive playing. But the instruments are lovingly recorded, without the close microphone placement that mars so many harpsichord discs, and St George's Bristol proves an ideal acoustic to accentuate the instruments' natural resonance.

The liner essay (evidently a reprint of Yates's recital notes) and the track listings are somewhat ungenerous. Nowhere does a reader find the dates of composition for the works included, nor the details of the manuscripts or published collections from which these works are drawn (with the sole exception of J. C. Bach's Op. 17). Those of us with access to *Musica Britannica* and composer catalogues can find these details, but the casual purchaser of this CD would have been better served with more extensive information. The following comments in this review aim to supply this information.

The recording begins with two pieces by John Blow, a thoroughly seventeenth-century man. Biographically, this can be seen through the fact that he is most often situated in relation to his most famous pupil, Purcell (including the well-known legend that he ceded his position at Westminster Cathedral to Purcell, and then resumed it after the student's death). Blow's seventeenth-century identity is also evident from the music represented on this recording. His 'Chacone in FaUt', preserved in manuscripts dating from the 1680s (the oldest being a version for multiple instruments, in GB-Ob Mus. Sch. E.443–5/F. 570, a4, and the oldest keyboard version dating from c1695–1705 in B-Bc 15139), shows how steeped Blow was in French practices, with carefully notated French-style ornamentation, clear indications of *notes inégales* for his Anglocentric performers and an impressive roster of virtuosic gestures, which allow Yates to get the recording off to a scintillating start. The ground that follows it, here entitled 'Morlake Ground' (though also called 'Morelake' and 'Mortlack' in some sources) probably also dates from the 1680s (the earliest source is GB-Och 1177, fols 22–20v [sic]; full details are given in *John Blow: Complete Harpsichord Music*, ed. Robert Klakowich, *Musica Britannica* 73 (London: Stainer and Bell, 1998)). It makes a nice pairing with the chaconne, in that it presents an Italianate take on a similar quasi-improvisatory tradition (the ground here being the same that Monteverdi used for 'Zefiro torna' in the *Scherzi musicali* of 1632).

Yates turns next to music by Jeremiah Clarke, another composer whose life barely stretched into the eighteenth century (Clarke dying in 1707). She plays a suite from the *Choice Lessons for the Harpsichord or Spinnett*, published in 1711. An attractive almand and a spritely jigg frame a central 'Round-O', an Anglicization of *rondeau*. At this point in the programming, Yates's chronological ordering runs slightly afoul of her generic choices; we have heard three cyclical pieces on the first quarter of the disc, which leaves us wanting a bit more formal variety. But the piece at least provides a different slant on the genre: Clarke's entries were designed for the then-burgeoning amateur music market, as opposed to the more virtuosic pieces by Blow.

Variety arrives with the recording's next two sets, which move us firmly into eighteenth-century musical language. A rarely recorded suite in D minor by William Croft serves as a transitional work. On the one hand, it is associated in extant sources with older music – the main source is an appendix to a Paris manuscript begun around 1680, which contains works by Purcell, Blow and sixteenth-century virginalists (F-Pn Rés. 1186 bis, pt. 1). The three movements are also arranged in a distinctly seventeenth-century manner: almand,



corant and sarabrand (Yates's liner notes unfortunately 'correct' the charming English rendering of this last dance name). On the other hand, the musical language is clearly moving into a different realm, with a tonal approach and an infusion of Italianate ideas: a fondness for Neapolitan harmonies, sequences around the circle of fifths and so forth. Still, the listener is subjected to a bit of a shock with the next work, an unabashedly modern and Italianate lesson in C major by Maurice Greene, published c1750 in *A Collection of Lessons for the Harpsichord*. The work is in a three-movement form common in this later period, but Greene is doggedly cheerful, with no slow movement: Allegro–Vivace–Allegro. The pieces show more than a little influence from Scarlatti's *Essercizi* and Bach's sons' output of this period; Greene was fond of the melodic-thematic logic, closely spaced dissonances and Alberti bass lines that those composers also employed. Greene's lessons also use a greater range than the previous pieces, particularly in the treble, which pushes up to the top of older instruments' compass quite regularly (d<sup>3</sup>). Yates switches to the larger-compassed Goujon harpsichord for these and the remaining pieces, and the shift in timbre well suits the change in idiom.

The next piece, the third instalment of Richard Jones's 1732 *Six Suits or Setts of Lessons*, is the least often recorded of these works, but also the most ambitious; at nearly eighteen minutes, it is the longest piece on the recording. The work embraces a grandly Couperinian concept of *goût réunis*, pasting together a four-movement sonata da chiesa and a set of French binary dances. Yates's playing here is superb, with a facile handling of complex ornaments in the French movements and a flamboyant approach to the Italianate sonata. The opening movement is in the grand orchestral style familiar from J. S. Bach's 'Italian Concerto' (published three years after Jones's), with a ritornello structure and dynamic use of the harpsichord's two manuals to imitate orchestral textures. These techniques reflect Jones's job as head of the Drury Lane orchestra, as well as the fact that Londoners were keen to experience the most popular public musical genres in their private studies. If there is anything to complain about here, it is the placement of this work on the disc; Jones's 'multinational' approach and the earlier date of this piece in comparison to Greene's *Collection of Lessons* mean that listeners might have been better eased from the older styles to the more modern music had Jones's set come before Greene's.

However, the decision to place Greene before Jones does allow for a nice link to the next piece, another rarity among recordings: the third sonata from a collection published by Thomas Arne in 1756 (*Eight Sonatas or Lessons for the Harpsichord*). The title 'sonata' signifies Arne's Italianism, as was common among the English of this period. Its second movement, like Jones's opening sonata, embraces the concerto style, with writing that gives the harpsichord 'tutti' and 'solo' passages, accomplished mostly by means of register. There is also some cosmopolitanism to this piece. It opens with a free prelude that culminates in a series of block chords marked 'arpeggio', quite familiar from Handel's keyboard publications and those of German composers of previous decades. The sonata ends with a French minuet, but one to which are appended a couple of virtuosic variations – another Handelian homage, perhaps.

The recording concludes with another quantum leap forward, into the heyday of Haydn and Mozart, with a sonata from J. C. Bach's Op. 17, *Six Sonates pour le Clavecin ou le Piano Forte*, of 1773/1774. This music is strikingly different from what we have heard before, with Greene's suite being the most related style. It must also be admitted that this really is fortepiano repertoire, with dynamic shifts (sometimes every bar) and crescendos marked in the score. Nevertheless, Yates navigates these changes gracefully by shifting manuals, even adding in a couple of echo effects of her own creation. The performance is a good reminder that these pieces must have been listened to and played by Londoners as often on harpsichords as on pianos. Hearing this up-to-date music on a slightly outdated harpsichord also serves as a nice emblem for the rest of the music on this disc, which showcases English composers always with their fingers on the pulse of current trends, while producing music for a public keenly aware of the 'ancient' music of Purcell and, by the time of J. C. Bach, Handel.

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