



nose-dive' (*The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 684). Evidently the recovery is underway.

TONY GABLE



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GOTTFRIED HEINRICH STÖLZEL (1690–1749)

TWO SERENATAS

Dorothee Miels, Elisabeth Graf, Knut Schoch, Ekkehard Abele / Telemannisches Collegium Michaelstein / Ludger Rémy

cpo, 777 094-2, 2007; two discs, 103 minutes

Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel's biography reads rather like a musician's ideal career. Several years spent studying in various countries, fending off offers of employment, were followed by a thirty-year 'steady job' as Kapellmeister at the court of Saxe-Gotha. Entering university in Leipzig in 1707, six years after Telemann, he was undoubtedly familiar with Telemann's work through his involvement (while still a student) with the *Collegium musicum* founded by the latter (though directed by Melchior Hofmann by 1707). Stölzel appears to have had the ability to make friends in high places throughout his life, for by 1710 he was teaching singing and keyboard amongst the aristocratic circles of Breslau, and subsequent time in Halle yielded a commission from the Zeitz court and the enthusiastic reception of a pastorale that he had written for the court at Gera, both of which resulted in offers of employment as Kapellmeister. The years 1713–1718 were spent in Venice, Rome, Florence, Prague and Bayreuth, and his success in each place is more than adequate testimony to the quality of his music.

The preservation of Stölzel's aria 'Bist du bei mir' (from the opera *Diomedes, oder Die triumphierende Unschuld*) in the second *Clavierbüchlein* for Anna Magdalena Bach is widely accepted as an indication of J. S. Bach's esteem for the composer (see Christoph Wolff, Hans-Joachim Schulze, Andreas Glöckner and Peter Wollny, 'Zurück in Berlin: Das Notenarchiv der Sing-Akademie. Bericht über eine erste Bestandsaufnahme', *Bach-Jahrbuch* 88 (2002), 165–180; the relevant section is Glöckner's 'Neues zum Thema Bach und die Oper seiner Zeit' on pages 172–174). Mattheson included Stölzel's autobiography in *Grundlage einer Ehren-Pforte* (Hamburg, 1740), though his admiration may have resulted at least in part from Stölzel's reputation as a theorist. Although the majority of his theoretical works are compilations, Stölzel's treatise on canon was printed in his lifetime (*Practischer Beweis, wie aus einem . . . Canone perpetui in hypodiapente quatuor vocum, viel und mancherley . . . Canones perpetui à 4 zu machen seyn*, 1725). His groundbreaking *Abhandlung vom Recitativ* (edited in Werner Steger, 'G. H. Stölzels *Abhandlung vom Recitativ*' (dissertation, University of Heidelberg, 1962)), written for Lorenz Christoph Mizler's Societät der Musikalischen Wissenschaften some time after 1739, when Stölzel was elected to the society, also earned him considerable respect amongst his contemporaries. After his death in 1749, however, his music seems to have fallen out of favour.

Armed with this biographical information, the listener may expect to hear similarities to the music of Bach, Handel and Telemann in Stölzel's music, and this is indeed the case in the two serenatas presented on this disc, *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet* and *Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden*. Echoes of Bach occur particularly in the recitatives, and similarities to Telemann's *Harmonischer Gottesdienst* (1726) can be heard in some of the more daring obbligato arias. Similarly, the dramatic pacing of both serenatas can easily remind the listener of Handel's oratorios, particularly those on pastoral themes. Despite this, however, Stölzel's music maintains a strong individuality, at times even pushing the boundaries of contemporary compositional practice, most notably by combining traditional structural designs with elements of newer approaches to form that were developing at the time.



Thought to have been performed as part of the celebrations for the birthday of Prince Günther I von Schwarzburg-Sondershausen on 13 August 1736, *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet* exists only in a manuscript copy. As most of the other occasional pieces composed for the Prince exist in autograph, this has prompted the suggestion that *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet* may have had some form of prior existence. Although this would indeed be redolent of Handel's practice of reusing his own material, no previous version of the serenata can be traced, leaving this particular source of curiosity unsatisfied. Typically among Stölzel's cantatas, *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet* centres on allegory, with each singer embodying a different register of the human voice. Under the guise of argument and discourse on music and harmony, each symbolic representation inevitably leads into praise and congratulations offered to the Prince. Unusually, Stölzel is thought to have written his own texts for most of his works, and, as Manfred Fechner points out in the liner notes, he regarded the writing of poetry as part of the creative process (16). Certainly it is plausible that Stölzel, with his strict theoretical principles, could have written the text for *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*. *Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden*, however, differs in that although allegory features in the text, it is directed towards the moral of the tale rather than at the Prince. As the liner notes point out, the libretto of *Seid willkommen* is 'an absolutely paradigmatic example of the genre of the pastoral drama' (17), and Stölzel's understanding of the principles of this genre is reflected in the style of the music, which is less declamatory than that of *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*, in keeping with Mattheson's directive (*Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 1739) that the music of pastoral dramas should be modest and innocent (liner notes, 17–18).

The two serenatas form ideal companions on this release, for after sixty-eight minutes of *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*, the contrast of timbre provided by the gentle opening movement of *Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden* is a welcome change. This is not to say that the latter serenata is at all superficial by comparison. Indeed, the movements progressively increase in pace towards the centre of the work, drawing the listener into the central journey of the drama. At only thirty-five minutes, *Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden* is half the length of the other serenata, but its relatively gentle pacing, combined with a number of da capo arias, means that the difference in length is not as noticeable as might be expected. Both serenatas are built on an attractive mixture of recitatives, arias and ensemble numbers, and Stölzel's instrumental writing is ingenious, occasionally rescuing an otherwise repetitive vocal number. In fact, Stölzel's compositional genius appears to come to life particularly in the ensemble numbers and those arias with obbligato instruments. The soprano aria 'Philomele, deine lockende tönende Kehl' (*Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*) is one such example, the interplay between voice and violin reminiscent of Handel's treatment of the flute obbligato in the aria 'Sweet Bird' from Part 1 of *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*.

Other excellent obbligato arias appear in *Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden*, one of which ('Es kommen die Wolken der Trübsal geschwinde') hints at a sense of humour in Stölzel's writing. Set to a text that describes the potential scattering of 'clouds of sorrow', the short ritornello phrase ends with a quick downward scale that portrays the scattering of clouds but also lends the idea a certain silliness. The idea of humour increases towards the end of the serenata, with a comical bass line (redolent of 'O ruddier than the cherry' from Handel's *Acis and Galatea*) in 'Was uns im Anfang bitter scheint', marking the beginning of the end for Myrtillo's ill-fated love designs. The ensuing lovers' duet is followed by a lively gigue, its dance-like string writing offset by the combined pomp of trumpets and timpani to signal the end of the work: a simple but effective tool.

Stölzel's choice of instrumentation is as refined as his dramatic structuring, as witnessed by his selective use of trumpets in *Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*, with echoes of J. S. Bach's writing for the instrument (in his *Magnificat* in D) in 'O wie schöne'. Further support for this is heard in the Sinfonia, in which the distinctly Handelian opening texture of contrasting string and wind (plus trumpet) sections is transformed subtly into an intricate weave of concertino and imitative effects that lead seamlessly into a tutti B section in minuet form.

The performance by the musicians of the Telemannisches Collegium Michaelstein is consistently impressive throughout both discs, despite small tuning difficulties in the upper violins in 'Die Biene zieht aus vielen Blumen' and a slight stumbling in the (admittedly speedy) 'Was meiner Leitung folgen soll' (both in *Alles*,



*was sonst lieblich heißet*). These movements are offset, however, by the beautifully erudite violin playing in 'Es kommen die Wolken' (*Seid willkommen, schöne Stunden*). Overall, the playing exudes a sense of command and a profound understanding of the demands of what is at times very 'metamorphic' music by dint of its often rapid and subtle changes of *Affekt*. Dorothee Miels (soprano) exhibits a similar sense of command, her flexible tone sinuous one moment and gay the next. Tenor Knut Schnoch delights with his clear tone and amazing clarity, though he could perhaps sound slightly more heroic at times, and contralto Elisabeth Graf is wonderful, her rich tone particularly suited to movements in a slower tempo, such as 'Die süßesten Züge der lieblichsten Weisen' (*Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*). Unfortunately, she is rather let down in the lovely duet 'Bloß nach dir' (*Alles, was sonst lieblich heißet*) by bass Ekkehard Abele, who consistently sings slightly under the note. Elsewhere on the discs he is engaging, though without the flexible command shown by the other soloists.

On both discs the recording quality, as always on cpo, is extremely high. So too are the liner notes, though their scholarship is at times let down by a rather poor translation that creates confusion not present in the original German. Some of Stölzel's works have appeared on labels other than cpo, but past issues have tended to be restricted to instrumental works, resulting in an imbalance in the recordings available. Far from being of purely archival interest, however, cpo's discs of Stölzel's vocal works focus attention on the high quality of his music, which promises a fulfilling musical experience for the listener.

AMANDA BABINGTON



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GEORG PHILIPP TELEMANN (1681–1767)

*SUITES FOR STRINGS*

B'Rock

Et'Cetera, KTC 4027, 2008; one disc, 50 minutes

We are in the midst of a golden age for recordings of Telemann's overture-suites. In recent years, many of the established period-instrument ensembles in Europe and North America have issued at least one CD devoted to this rich and seemingly inexhaustible repertory of one hundred and twenty or so works, and two complete recorded cycles are underway – one by the Collegium Instrumentale Brugense under Patrick Peire (on modern instruments) for Brilliant Classics, and the other by the Moscow-based Pratum Integrum Orchestra (on period instruments) for Caro Mitis. This is a welcome development not only for fans of Telemann's music, but also for those susceptible to the considerable charms of the overture-suite, a genre that in modern times has been overshadowed by its flashier contemporary, the solo concerto. Such recordings, along with those of similar works by Johann Friedrich Fasch, Christoph Graupner and their contemporaries, have helped extend our view well beyond mainstays like J. S. Bach's four overture-suites and Handel's *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*.

The Flemish baroque orchestra B'Rock has selected three fine Telemann suites with characteristic titles for its programme: 'La Bizarre', TWV55:G2; 'La Musette', TWV55:g1; and 'La Lyra', TWV55:Es3. All three works have been recorded previously, and indeed 'La Musette' is especially well represented on disc. Their popularity relative to most comparable works entitled 'Ouverture' has at least something to do with their descriptive sobriquets, none of which, ironically enough, stems from Telemann himself: 'La Bizarre' and 'La Lyra' are the work of eighteenth-century scribes, and 'La Musette' was devised by Arnold Schering for his 1913 edition of the suite (one of the first publications of the composer's orchestral music since his lifetime).

Both TWV55:Es3 and G2 originated either during Telemann's tenure as city music director at Frankfurt (1712–1721) or shortly after he assumed a similar position at Hamburg in 1721. Perhaps they were intended for