



Six of Rode's concertos have already been recorded on Naxos, but there are seven others, including the First, which was one of Paganini's favourites. It is easy to see why from the first-movement passagework (some of it even echoed in Paganini's own first concerto), contrasting sections of cantilena and the strong polonaise rhythm in the finale. The affinity between Rode's First Concerto and another violin concerto, the one in D minor by a then-thirteen-year-old Felix Mendelssohn, has yet to be posed on a CD coupling. The vital role Rode played in shaping the history of nineteenth-century music has remained underexplored, though this is symptomatic of a more general trend in musicology to underplay the role of those who were primarily performers in favour of the alpha composers. Not until his life and work are better understood, in a wider historical context, will there be the requisite perspective and judgement to appraise fully the worthy if somewhat misdirected effort represented on this CD.

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ANTONIO ROSETTI (1750–1792)
OBOE CONCERTOS, SYMPHONIES

Kurt W. Meyer (oboe) / Zürcher Kammerorchester / Johannes Moesus
cpo 777 631–2, 2011; one disc, 71 minutes

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century the court of Prince Kraft Ernst zu Oettingen-Wallerstein, at Wallerstein near Nördlingen, was one of the most important musical establishments in south Germany. The prince, a great connoisseur of music, maintained a *Hofkapelle* with about twenty-five salaried instrumentalists, and amassed an extensive library of performing material for works by composers from all over Germany and Austria, including no fewer than eighty Haydn symphonies (some of them commissioned by Kraft Ernst himself) and the court oboist F. X. Fürall's repertoire of some twenty concertos. The library still exists (it is currently housed in the University Library at Augsburg), and is one of the leading sources for music of the period.

The reputation of the Wallerstein *Hofkapelle* was such that many eminent musicians were guests at the court. Mozart stopped at the prince's castle of Hohenaltheim in October 1777, on his way to Mannheim, and Haydn conducted his Symphony No. 92 (later known as the 'Oxford') at Wallerstein in December 1790, en route to London. Even the young Beethoven paid a visit in 1787.

From at least the early 1770s the music director (*Intendant*) at Wallerstein was Ignaz von Beecke (1733–1803), army officer, self-taught keyboard player, and friend and rival of Mozart. The Bohemian Antonio Rosetti (né Anton Rösler) was recruited as a livery servant and double bass player in 1773; a year later he was appointed to the official position of *Hofmusik*, and by the mid-1780s he had been promoted to Kapellmeister. Both men wrote music for the court: Beecke's is competent if not especially distinguished, but in Rosetti the prince was fortunate enough to employ a very fine composer – one of the best after Haydn and Mozart. His many symphonies and concertos are meticulously crafted, tuneful, harmonically inventive and colourfully scored. The taut control of the musical material and its development puts one in mind of Haydn – yet Rosetti's is a genuinely individual voice. His works are full of fresh ideas, with many delightfully unexpected touches, such as the use of only flutes and horns to announce the cadenza in the first movement of one of the two oboe concertos recorded here, and the surprise *pianissimo* ending to its finale. Rosetti has a remarkable talent for keeping the listener guessing about what will happen next.

This CD includes two symphonies and two oboe concertos, all of them probably dating from the second half of the 1770s. The symphonies (catalogued A32 and A16 in Sterling E. Murray, *The Music of Antonio*



Rosetti (Anton Rösler), ca. 1750–1792: A Thematic Catalog (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park, 1997)) are in three movements, without a minuet – although A32 has a slow introduction with a prominent oboe solo. Both were published in Paris, in 1779 and 1781 respectively. The oboe concertos (catalogued C29 and C30) come from manuscript parts in the Oettingen-Wallerstein archive – incomplete in the case of C29, but there is another source in the Utrecht archive.

The performances – on modern instruments – are spirited and polished. The oboe soloist adds a little tasteful decoration to his part, although his formal cadenzas are too long and rather outstay their welcome. (I am reminded of Quantz's advice that cadenzas for a wind instrument ought to be playable in one breath!) The programme booklet does not say how big the orchestra is: I would guess between fifteen and twenty strings. This is a perfectly acceptable size for the symphonies, but is rather too massive for the concertos. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, there is good evidence that it was common practice in the second half of the eighteenth century to use a smaller group to accompany concertos than would have been used to perform symphonies. It is a striking fact that in the Oettingen-Wallerstein archive most sets of parts for Rosetti's symphonies, like those of the other composers represented there, include two copies of at least the first and second violin parts, but nearly all the concerto sets have no duplicates. It is the same story in the even larger archive of the Thurn und Taxis court at Regensburg. Does this mean that concertos were still normally played one-to-a-part, as in the baroque period? (See Richard Maunder, *The Scoring of Baroque Concertos* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004).) Almost certainly not in the case of the Rosetti oboe concertos on this CD: they are scored with two viola parts composed in unison some of the time, which would result in an implausibly unbalanced texture if the violins were single. The conclusion must be, therefore, that the composer intended the violin parts to be shared two apiece, as in a modern orchestra, so that the string section would have numbered 2/2/2/1/1 (single cello and double bass because there is only one part for the two of them).

Despite my grumbles, however, this is a most enjoyable disc of some highly attractive and rewarding music.

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