



of this album is very forward, very up front. While one might wish that more music from this period would be engineered this way, quiet playing would still be welcome here, and would still shine through, despite the forward engineering.

DOUG BALLIETT
dballiett@gmail.com



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JEAN-BENJAMIN DE LABORDE (1734–1794), FRANCESCO PETRINI (1744–1819), JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683–1764), JEAN-BAPTISTE FORQUERAY (1699–1782)
LABORDE – RAMEAU: SONGS AND CHAMBER MUSIC WITH HARP, VIOLIN AND HARPSICHORD
 Mailys de Villoutreys (soprano) / Trio Dauphine: Clara Izambert (harp), Maud Giguet (baroque violin), Marie van Rhijn (harpsichord)
 evidence EVCDo08, 2015; one disc, 72 minutes

This disc from the French ensemble Trio Dauphine with guest soprano Mailys de Villoutreys provides a welcome insight into the treasure trove of unexplored and unrecorded repertory that is the eighteenth-century French chanson. With its unique instrumental combination of harpsichord, violin and single-action harp, the trio also contributes to a still vastly uninvestigated area of performance practice, that of the eighteenth-century single-action harp and its diverse musical functions. In this instance the focus is pre-revolutionary Paris and salon music, for which the single-action harp was surely the ultimate instrument. The first harp to feature a pedal mechanism, which allowed for continuous scales and arpeggio figures whilst modulating to various keys, this instrument made its first appearance in Austria around 1720 and was introduced to France in the mid-eighteenth century with performances at the Concert Spirituel. It quickly became a wildly popular accomplishment for aristocratic young women, as is evidenced by the number of methods (particularly pitched at a growing market of amateurs and beginners), teachers and harp makers, and by the growing repertory. Contemporary art also testifies to the popularity of the instrument. The Parisian theatrical impresario Charles-Simon Favart summed it up in 1761 when he remarked of the instrument that ‘all the ladies are mad to play it’ (*‘la harpe est aujourd’hui l’instrument à la mode; toutes nos dames ont la fureur d’en jouer’*). Charles-Simon Favart, *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires, dramatiques et anecdotiques de C. S. Favart*, ed. Henri François Dumolard, three volumes (Paris: L. Collin, 1808), volume 1, 147).

On this disc, the single-action harp is featured in world-premiere recordings of chansons by the little-known French composer Jean-Benjamin de Laborde (1734–1794). The ensemble has undertaken research in the archives of the Bibliothèque nationale de France to bring to life extracts from three collections of chansons with harp, violin and harpsichord accompaniment by Laborde published in Paris in 1763, and the resulting disc was co-produced by this institution. The disc’s title *Laborde – Rameau* points to both the inclusion of an arrangement of Jean-Philippe Rameau’s *Deuxième Concert* and the connection between the two composers. Rameau was Laborde’s composition teacher, and the first movement of the *Deuxième Concert* is titled ‘La Laborde’, although it is not known whether this refers to the ‘Laborde’ in question. Also bearing the title of ‘La Laborde’ is an extract from the Suite No. 1 in D minor for solo harpsichord by French viol virtuoso Jean-Baptiste Forqueray (1699–1782). Further socio-musical connections with Laborde appear via a solo sonata for single-action harp by the prolific harpist-composer Francesco Petrini (1744–1819). Born in Berlin, Petrini spent most of his career in Paris, and wrote the harp accompaniments to arrangements of arias from Laborde’s various *opéras comiques*. The dedicatee of Sonata No. 3 featured here is Mlle de Laborde; the disc’s liner notes



posit the theory that this ‘Laborde’ may be the illegitimate daughter of Jean-Benjamin de Laborde and famous dancer at the Paris Opera known as ‘La Guimard’.

Today Laborde is better known for his monumental four-volume *Essai sur la musique ancienne et moderne* (Paris: Ph.-D. Pierres, 1780) than for his compositions. In line with the Enlightenment project of the encyclopedists of his day, Laborde’s *Essai* was an ethnographic and historiographical study of music from antiquity to the eighteenth century, including non-European civilizations. Contemporary opinions about his compositions were somewhat dim, especially with regard to his *opéras comiques*. Critic and encyclopedist Baron von Grimm described Laborde’s 1768 opera *Meunière de Gentilly* as ‘mauvais et plat, musique assommante et baroque, sans génie, sans goût, sans idées’ (poor and flat, tedious and baroque music, without genius, without taste, without ideas).

My introduction to Laborde’s music with the first four chansons of this disc gave quite the opposite impression: they encapsulate the ravishingly sweet and often seductive charm of this repertory. ‘Non, non, tous les coeurs’ is typical of chansons of this genre, with alternating major–minor sections and a pastoral theme; on this occasion the wounded lover’s cries are reflected in the song of the nightingale and the sighs of the dove. Maily de Villoutreys, whose singing is a delight throughout, makes the most of a sighing, breathy motive in the vocal line, her sweet, pure tone imbued with a convincingly pleading, urgent affect. The harp provides a continuous accompaniment of arpeggios and *battéries* (repeated Alberti bass-type figures) typical of the vocal accompaniment style given to the instrument in this period. However, the timbre of the harp on this recording strikes a false note. The instrument harpist Clara Izambert used for this recording is an early nineteenth-century single-action harp (c1820) attributed to Georges Blaicher. It is a later instrument than the kind that would have been used for Laborde’s chansons, with heavier tension, thicker strings and different construction. The tone quality is not as bright in the treble nor as clear and warm in the bass. An earlier instrument would have been a much more sympathetic match for the harpsichord on this recording – this harp, in contrast, seems out of place in tone, timbre and articulation. It may be that Ms Izambert did not have access to an earlier instrument for this disc, but her clear and sensitive playing would be shown to much more advantage on a more appropriate instrument for this repertory.

Harpsichordist Marie van Rhijn offers imaginative continuo playing throughout, underlining the drama of the text with thoughtful changes in register, such as in the rustic scene depicting virtue under threat in ‘Chanson Villageoise’; she makes wonderfully effective use of the lute stop in ‘Dors, dors’. Sometimes the texture becomes too heavy where a thinner voicing would have sufficed, and the harpsichord tends to dominate, with the harp sounding muted and very much in the background. Primarily, though, this seems to be an issue of balance resulting from the recording process rather than from interpretive decisions on the part of the musicians.

The contrast between through-composed harp accompaniment and harpsichord continuo poses some interesting questions for performance practice. Harpists during this period would have also studied basso continuo on the keyboard, and many eighteenth-century harp treatises, while providing written-out accompaniments for beginners, also provide instruction on how to extemporize accompaniments for chansons in this style. Certainly the solo harp functions beautifully as accompaniment: some of the most charming moments are when harp and voice are alone together, such as in the brief, tender lament to the eternal feminine in ‘Iris’, the more expansive ‘Regrets de Pétrarque’ and the sensuous ‘L’aurore’, which recalls Rameau in style. Here the grace and Rousseauian melodic simplicity of these chansons come across most clearly. Perhaps this is licence enough for harpists skilled in the art of basso continuo to extemporize on Laborde’s through-composed accompaniments? There is certainly enough evidence to encourage further use and exploration of the single-action harp as a basso continuo instrument.

Baroque violinist Maud Giguet provides sensitive further accompaniment, delightfully light articulation and flexible lines to match the voice, and rhetorical interjections at the right moments. This vocal quality is further highlighted in the trio’s arrangement of Rameau’s *Deuxième Concert*, which is a nice nod to the late eighteenth-century propensity for arrangements. From Rameau’s *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741), which were among the first works to explore the idea of solo harpsichord music coloured by string or wind



instruments, the *Deuxième Concert* was published by Rameau in several versions. In this arrangement by Trio Dauphine the harp part is adapted from the bass viol part, but the scoring is not always convincing. 'La Boucon' seems a missed opportunity to make use of the harp as a continuo instrument and 'L'agaçante' loses some of its affective bite. In a chromatic passage during the second menuet, I was distracted by the sounds of pedalling on the harp, which could have been avoided by giving this section to the harpsichord. These are minor quibbles, though, and the trio demonstrates fine ensemble playing throughout. The disc finishes on a high note with 'Non, je n'aimerai jamais', a lover's fervent declaration of his fidelity and virtue, which is given a spirited delivery.

The liner notes provide the texts of the chansons in both the original French and in English translation. Biographies of the composers and thoughtful background on the French chanson and the French single-action harp are also included. Unfortunately, much of the English translation is clumsy and contains numerous errors and incomplete sentences.

This disc contains many pleasures for the listener and must be commended for its originality in exploring an area of repertory that has been previously neglected. The performers certainly make a convincing case for the beauty, grace and charm of Laborde's chansons, and I hope that their valuable work will spark further interest in this genre and its performance practice.

HANNAH LANE

hannah.mila.lane@gmail.com



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GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759), JOHN CHRISTOPHER SMITH (1712–1795)

SMITH & HANDEL

Julian Perkins (harpsichord)

Chandos 0807, 2015; one disc, 78 minutes

In this premiere recording of *Six Suits of Lessons for the Harpsichord*, Op. 3, by John Christopher Smith, British harpsichordist Julian Perkins 'seeks to reappraise Smith' (8), a musician better remembered as George Frideric Handel's amanuensis than as a talented composer in his own right. The title of the recording, *Smith & Handel*, a provocative reversal of the normal order of master and assistant, telegraphs the artist's approach to this reappraisal. Though Perkins could easily have sought to bring Smith out of Handel's shadow by exploring his lesser-known historical connections (with, for example, his teachers J. C. Pepusch and Thomas Roseingrave) or novel stylistic resonances (with, for instance, the works of Domenico Scarlatti or C. P. E. Bach), he opts instead to present a fresh reading of Smith's best-known relationship.

Handel thus serves as the opening act for Smith's Op. 3. Perkins begins the programme with the Overture from the opera *Riccardo Primo, re d'Inghilterra*, arranged by Handel himself – an appropriately theatrical introduction for the often-histrionic *Suits of Lessons*. The selection of the French-style Overture obliquely reinforces Smith's subservience to Handel: as Perkins notes, Smith's father, who was Handel's previous amanuensis, copied out *Riccardo Primo*. As a prelude, it sets a classical stage for the modern drama of Smith's lessons, though Perkins's performance is anything but staid. The bass line, bounding along under Perkins's clipped touch, anchors exuberant embellishments on the repeat of the first section. A repeated-note ornament calls to mind both a Monteverdian *trillo* and a trumpet fanfare.

Published in 1755, Smith's Op. 3 was a marked departure from the composer's *Suites de Pieces Pour le Clavecin*, Opp. 1 and 2, which had been issued in the 1730s when Smith was in his twenties. These earlier works are conservative in style and resemble Handelian suites, each consisting of four to six movements