

and Handel in the high baroque, and so on. In the late classical, early Romantic zone, the colossus is Beethoven -- incomparable in every possible way. Carus and Frieder Bernius continue to explore the music of the fairly obscure Justin Heinrich Knecht and the present recording (just like his opera *Die Geisterinsel* a few issues ago) reveal a very capable composer, with a keen ear for orchestral colour, a definite gift for melodic invention, and quite a few original ideas -- most importantly his very own five-movement pastoral symphony of 1783, complete with a programmatic note detailing the arrival of a storm, its passing, and the general air of rejoicing afterwards. Sounds a little familiar? I don't know what it is that makes me still want to write something about lacking the profundity of Beethoven, but that is how I genuinely feel. The remainder of the disc is comprised of extract from other large works. Sarah Wegener has a very beautiful voice -- full, yet flexible, pitch perfect throughout, and agile through Knecht's most ornate lines. As on previous outings, the Hofkapelle Stuttgart (especially those beautiful winds!) are on excellent form. All in all this disc is a revelation on a number of levels, and I hope Carus continue to support these performers in their advocacy of Knecht's music. BC

**Marchand / Rameau** Christophe Rousset  
hpscd 69' 20"

Ambronay AMY032

**Marchand** Suites in d (1699), g (1702) & 3 pieces; **Rameau**: Suite in a (1706)

This recital is as much about the instrument -- one of the first to be built in France with a full five octave chromatic compass -- as about the music. The maker, Pierre Donzelague, was working in Lyon at the same time as Rameau and the note suggests that they may have collaborated on the design of this harpsichord, built in 1716. Marchand (1669-1732) was born in Lyon, so the city serves as the link binding the programme together. The harpsichord has two manuals and a truly sumptuous sound which Rousset exploits to the full in this admirably chosen programme. He avoids the big showpieces in favour of the more restrained side of Rameau as represented in his relatively early suite. The words 'nobility and gravity' that the player uses to describe this music might also be applied to his playing of it. Even the plethora of ornaments has a certain grandeur. Every harpsichord lover should hear this. David Hansell

**Pisendel Violin concertos from Dresden**  
Johannes Pramsohler, International Baroque Players. 58' 08"  
Raumklang RK3105

I have reviewed violinist Johannes Pramsohler several times in his role as concertmaster and director of the International Baroque Players and have always been impressed as much for his sensitive and unassuming direction as for his impressive playing. He thoroughly deserves a CD that focuses on his ability as a violin soloist, and who better to accompany him than the talented young players of IBP. The programme is an attractive group of four Concertos and one Sonata by Fasch, Heinichen, Handel, Telemann and Pisendel, all but one represented by world premiere recordings. Pisendel gains the prominence of the CD's title, not just on the basis of the being the world premiere recording of his Concerto in G for violin, horns, oboes, bassoon and strings, but more for his role as concertmaster of the Dresden Court orchestra and his consequent links with the other composers represented. Bach almost certainly had him in mind in the violin solo of *Laudamus te* of the B minor Mass, and Telemann was also well aware of his skills. As well as his undoubted skills as a virtuoso performer, Johannes Pramsohler also shows himself as capable of an outstanding delicacy of tone and musical use of gentle rhetoric. Listen, for example, to the *Affettuoso* of Heinichen's Vivaldian Concerto (track 6) for musical interpretation that really does reaches the parts. Pramsohler is aided by excellent contributions from Joel Raymond and Leo Duarte, oboes, Anneke Scott and Gilbert Cami Farrà, horns, Eva Caballero and Marto Gonçalves, flutes, and Rebecca Stockwell, bassoon. Andrew Benson-Wilson

**Porpora Vespri per la Festività dell' Assunta** Le Parlement de Musique, La Maîtrise de Bretagne, Martin Gester  
ambronay AMY030 64' 04"

Ambronay recordings are always interesting -- the festival explores unfamiliar repertoire, generally works that one reads about in journals but never hears. This is definitely the case here: I have seen editions of Porpora's music for services in the Venice ospedale, but this is the first time I have actually heard any of it. Much has been made of Vivaldi's singing girls giving sacred concerts from behind the grilles high in the church balconies but, as I wrote of Bach above, Vivaldi did not live

in a bubble and he was far from the only major composer writing for such forces. Martin Gester, the director of this project, is also not someone who fears stepping into the unknown -- his fabulous recording of music by Capricornus may be almost 20 years old, but it is still a regular visitor to my CD player! Here, three soloists (sopranos Marilia Vargas and Michiko Takahashi with Delphine Galou, alto) join a "choir" of 12 (SSAA), and a string orchestra (33111) with two theorbos and organ in three psalms (*Laudate pueri*, *Laetatus sum* and *Lauda Jerusalem* -- so not quite a complete Vespers) and a setting for alto and strings of the Marian antiphon, *Salve regina*. My fussy Spanish visitor was not keen on Porpora's filigree and "lack of substance". I, on the other hand, was quite happy to let what was basically a sequence of operatic movements wash over me, nowhere more so than in the *Salve regina*, which I am very surprised has not become a far more regular on concert programmes. What is all the more remarkable about these performances is that they were just that -- the audiences in Ambronay enjoyed these live gems in the wonderful abbey setting. That must have been about as close as it is possible to get to experiencing something of Porpora's world. And quite a wonderful evening! BC

**Rameau, Balbastre, Royer** *Airs d'opéra accomodés pour le clavecin* Catherine Zimmer 76'

L'Encelade ECL1001

French harpsichordist Catherine Zimmer has the measure of this collection of arrangements by Balbastre of show tunes from Louis XV's reign. Most are taken from the operas of Rameau and Mondonville, together with airs based on music by Scarlatti, Balbastre himself and others. There is quite a bit of light-hearted flummery here but also more serious *airs tendres* and three more extended pieces by Pancrace Royer which show Zimmer to have both a formidable technique (in the well-known *Marche des Scythes*) and the stamina for longer pieces of musical expression. She plays on a harpsichord by Martine Argellies, after Goujon, and makes good use of its variety of colours with some sensitive registration. A good introduction to the late stages of French harpsichord music, played with a sense of fun and on its own terms. Noel O'Regan

**Seixas Harpsichord Sonatas** 2 Débora Halász 73' 38"