

G. F. Handel - Complete Organ Concertos (2002)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 31 March 2011 08:53 - Last Updated Friday, 06 December 2013 15:10

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Disc 1

6 Concerti per l'organo ed altri stromenti Op.4

01. Concerto No.1 in G minor HWV289 : I. Larghetto e staccato - Adagio
02. II. Allegro
03. III. Adagio
04. IV. Andante
05. Concerto No.2 in B flat major HWV290 : I. A tempo ordinario e staccato - Adagio
06. II. Allegro
07. III. Adagio e staccato
08. IV. Allegro ma non presto [play](#)
09. Concerto No.3 in G minor HWV291 : I. Adagio
10. II. Allegro
11. III. Adagio
12. IV. Gavotte. Allegro
13. Concerto No.4 in F major HWV292 : I. Allegro
14. II. Andante
15. III. Adagio
16. IV. Allegro
17. Concerto No.5 in F major HWV293 : I. Larghetto
18. II. Allegro
19. III. Alla Siciliana
20. IV. Presto
21. Concerto No.6 in B flat major for harp HWV294 : I. Andante allegro
22. II. Larghetto - Adagio
23. III. Allegro moderato

Disc 2

6 Concerti per l'organo Op.7

01. Concerto No.1 in B flat major HWV306: I. Andante
02. II. Andante - Allegro
03. III. Largo e piano
04. IV. Allegro
05. V. Organo ad libitum. Adagio
06. VI. Bourree. Allegro

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07. *Concerto No.2 in A major HWV307: I. Ouverture*
08. *II. A tempo ordinario*
09. *III. Organo ad libitum. Adagio*
10. *IV. Allegro*
11. *Concerto No.3 in B flat major HWV308: I. Allegro*
12. *II. Organo ad libitum. Adagio - Fuga*
13. *III. Spiritoso*
14. *IV. Menuet* [play](#)
15. *Concerto No.4 in D minor HWV309: I. Adagio*
16. *II. Allegro cosi cosi*
17. *III. Organo ad libitum. Fuga, Larghetto*
18. *IV. Allegro*

Disc 3

01. *Concerto No.5 in D minor HWV310: I. Staccato ma non troppo allegro*
02. *II. Andante larghetto e staccato*
03. *III. Menuet*
04. *IV. Gavotte*
05. *Concerto No.6 in B flat major HWV311: I. Pomposo*
06. *II. Organo ad libitum. Air. Lentement*
07. *III. Air. A tempo ordinario* [play](#)
08. *Organ Concerto in F major HWV295 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale': I. Larghetto*
09. *II. Allegro*
10. *III. Larghetto*
11. *IV. Allegro*
12. *Organ Concerto in A major HWV296: I. Largo e staccato*
13. *II. Organo ad libitum. Fuga. Allegro*
14. *III. Andante*
15. *IV. Grave*
16. *V. Allegro*
17. *Organ Concerto in D minor HWV304: I. Andante*
18. *II. Organo ad libitum. Adagio - Fuga*
19. *III. Allegro*

Simon Preston - organ

Ursula Holliger - harp

English Concert Orchestra

Conductor - Trevor Pinnock

To embark upon all the organ concertos in Handel's Op. 4 and Op. 7 means offering listeners another opportunity of enjoying this treasure house of delights, a store so entrancing that one is

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tempted to hear the whole lot straight off—and indeed I could hear them twice over without any difficulty. This opening set provides the six concertos of Op. 4 plus No. 14 from Op. 17. I will state at once that we have here a first-class product which will give endless pleasure and bear a good deal of repetition. So this is perhaps a decent moment to slip in a couple of comments on the debit side. First, I would have preferred to have the organ further forward, if it is so often to be modest in its registration. If there are good reasons why it should be placed at a distance, then the registration needs perking up and the soloist's right hand must not rely so much on legato playing. Secondly, this particular instrument has an unlovable bass to its diapason stop. When upper work is added, all is well on all counts.

The organ, built by John Byfield in 1766, is in the Finchcocks collection. As the concertos proceed, the integration aspect becomes even surer, and by the time No. 14 comes along, the orchestra is wonderfully warm. Concerto No. 3 is perhaps the point at which the magic really begins to take. From its elegant start, with solo and cello parts, to its brilliant final Gavotte, the texture is always interesting and the playing alive. Number 4 has some subtle and welcome pizzicato in the accompaniment and what sounds like a stowaway harp in the Andante. It bobs up again in No. 5—and then, lo and behold, takes the place of the organ in No. 6, with charm, precision and warmth. The harpist is Ursula Holliger playing a baroque harp of c1780. Number 14 is first class on all counts, and well balanced. Simon Preston maintains throughout a lively presentation, despite the production disadvantage mentioned earlier, and his ad lib. sections are always apt and interesting.

My personal preferences in no way detract from the quality of his achievement. Op. 7 contains more surprises than Op. 4 and some heart-warming moments when you would least expect them. For example, the Minuet and Gavotte at the end of No. 11, scored for orchestra alone (a strange way to end an organ concerto, you may think) turn out to be two of the most delightful movements Handel ever wrote, certainly the way they are played by the English Concert. Another aspect of this second set, well served in this recording, is the amount of ad lib. playing required of the soloist. Apart from cadenzas and random effusions from time to time, Handel twice indicates the need for an Adagio e fuga—in No. 9 and 15. The composer was giving the instruction to himself. It is another matter when someone else has to pick up the threads. Simon Preston's improvisations are completely assured and beautifully worked, with individual touches and part-playing of a high order. I cannot praise enough the disciplined eagerness of The English Concert. They bring out all the fresh joy of Handel's music and their observations of his forte and piano contrasts make this device sound as though it had never been done before.

Op. 7 was recorded at St John's, Armitage in Staffordshire, whose organ was built by Samuel Green in 1789-91. It comes into its own in Concerto No. 10, its solemnity mingling fraternally with two cellos and two bassoons in a deliberately learned conversation designed to make the brilliance of the subsequent D major movement all the more startling. Before the final

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movement, Simon Preston improvises a fugue, with pedals. His use of cornet solos, especially in the Ground Bass movement of No. 11 is very effective, but the organ occasionally produces some sour notes (the ad lib. fugue in No. 15 suffers from this). As I mentioned above, I would have liked the organ brighter and further forward, but this is a personal opinion and is not meant to diminish my warm feeling for this distinguished set.' --- Gramophone 10/1984

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