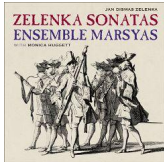


Jan Dismas Zelenka – Sonatas (2012)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 27 October 2009 14:48 - Last Updated Wednesday, 09 July 2014 16:56

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Sonata in F major ZWV181/5 1 [*Allegro*] [6'51] 2 [*Adagio*] [3'06] 3 *Allegro* [6'17] Sonata in
B flat major ZWV181/3
4 *Adagio* [3'27] 5 *Allegro* [4'02] 6 *Largo* [2'55] 7 *Tempo giusto; Allegro* [4'47]
Sonata in C minor ZWV181/6
8 [*Andante*] [3'03] 9 [*Allegro*] [4'07] 10 *Adagio* [2'39] 11 [*Allegro*] [5'03]
Symphonie à 8 concertanti in A minor ZWV189
12 *Andante* [2'58]
Monica Huggett (violin) Ensemble Marsyas

These sonatas represent some of the most spectacularly challenging music ever written for wind instruments in terms of their utopian demands on the technique of the players, their musical integrity and their breathtaking scale. Members from the Edinburgh-based chamber group were awarded both first prize and the audience prize at the 2007 Brugge International Competition for this repertoire and their skill is evident on this, their debut recording.
---hyperion-records.co.uk

Czech Baroque composer Jan Dismas Zelenka was a near contemporary of Bach, who admired him (and not too many other composers). The pieces on this album, which unite intense technical and contrapuntal virtuosity with lightness of spirit, make it easy to see why. They were roughly contemporaneous with Bach's Brandenburg Concertos, and may have been written for similar purposes (as a kind of audition). These pieces are what were called quadri or quadro sonate ("quartet sonatas," to be distinguished from the earlier sonata a quattro). They are for two oboes, bassoon, and continuo, or in one case oboe, violin, bassoon, and continuo. The oboe and bassoon are not easy instruments to play; the Baroque oboe and bassoon are harder

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still; and to play difficult lines in intricate ensemble work on these instruments is nothing short of miraculous. Yet that is what happens in this reading of three of the sonatas plus an excerpt from one larger work that better exemplifies Zelenka's tendency toward the bizarre. The three sonatas, for all their difficulty, are graceful pieces, and Scotland's Ensemble Marsyas carries them off with enviable smoothness and even quietness. It's an extraordinary performance, and the sweet pastoral sounds of Peter Whelan's Baroque bassoon will be worth the price of admission by themselves for many listeners. The Linn label contributes strongly as well with fine engineering, scaled to the intimate conception of the music but not sitting right on top of the players and picking up the clicking of keys and the like. There are a few other recordings of these pieces (Heinz Holliger popularized them), but this is an excellent choice for first exposure to the still-underrated Zelenka as well as for those already hooked. ---James Manheim, Rovi

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