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Founder: Len Mullenger Editor in Chief:John Quinn

Joseph Bodin de BOISMORTIER (1689-1755)
Sonatas for two bassoons and continuo: no.1 in E minor, op.50 [7:55]; no.3 in G, op.26 [7:35]; no.1 in D minor, op.40 [6:24]; no.5 in G minor, op.26 [7:20]; no.3 in D minor, op.14 [10:41]; no.2 in G, op.50 [10:39]; no.5 in G minor, op.40 [5:58]; no.6 in C, op.14 [8:31]; no.2 in A minor, op.26 [6:33]; Rondeau in A minor, op.40 [1:58]; Chaconne in A, op.66 [3:05]
Musica Franca: (Mathieu Lussier (solo bassoon); Nadina Mackie Jackson (bassoon); Fraser Jackson (contrabassoon); Sylvain Bergeron (theorbo); Richard Paré (harpsichord and organ))
rec. 17-19 May 2005, St.Anne's Anglican Church, Toronto. DDD
MSR CLASSICS MS 1170 [75:15]

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I suppose this disc comes, strictly speaking, into the "special interest" category. But to restrict it to bassoon-nuts or Baroque anoraks would be a sad mistake, for this is, in its way, a quite extraordinary recording.

The music first: Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (crazy name, crazy guy) was a hugely successful and, eventually, wealthy Parisian composer from the first half of the 18th century. The works enshrined on this disc were dedicated to a distinguished cellist of the day, Labbé; but Boismortier definitely intended that many of his pieces could be performed on several different instruments (thereby no doubt enhancing potential sales!). There's no doubt that, as bassoonist Mathieu Lussier points out in his note on the composer, these sonatas suit the character of the bassoon perfectly. Despite their modesty, they comprise perfectly formed movements in many different rhythms, tempi and styles, making for delightful listening.

The performances are stunning. Lussier, though an undemonstrative player, performs some almost unbelievable stunts, nonchalantly pulling off lengthy passages of rapid fingering and/or tonguing that require the very heights of virtuosity. He is joined by Nadina Mackie Jackson, a player of comparable quality, and possessed of a particularly beautiful singing tone. These two carol together in the most utterly beguiling way.

A sequence of works like this could easily become monotonous – that danger would exist if these were trio sonatas for strings, or whatever else. However, Musica Franca avoid that by varying the ensemble subtly; the addition of a contrabassoon here, a theorbo (bass lute) there, sometimes organ, sometimes harpsichord, so that the ear is caressed rather than bored.

The standard of intonation is uncannily good, resulting in many really gorgeous textures. And last but not least, these bassoonists have taken the trouble to silence

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their key-work, so that we are mercifully spared the clanking and slapping sounds that too often accompany bassoon recordings.

I urge you to try this – delightful music played with consummate skill, and recorded to perfection.

Gwyn Parry-Jones

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