Portugal's *Christmas Matins* (Rio de Janeiro, 1811) provides no such revelations, though it supplies plenty of festive good cheer. Unlike many sacred works of the period that at the very least pay lip-service to independent voice-writing, the *Matins*, comprised of eight responsories

containing three nocturnes each, makes little effort to curb its worldly appetites in deference to its hallowed material. The choral voices move almost exclusively in songlike parallel motion, and oft-repeated features such as the hushed staccato interjections of the choir in coquettish dialogue with the soloists remind one at times of an extended opera buffa ensemble scene. The one consistent reminder of its sacred purpose is the presence of the organ, here mainly exploited for its exotic color in the orchestra, whose instrumentation—clarinets, bassoons, horn, trombone, violas, cellos, double bass, and timpani—is notable for its low sonorities. The cello and, in a wink to the nativity theme, the pastoral clarinets are given leading turns, while the solo vocalists and choir share equal billing, frequently alternating though rarely intertwining.

Ensemble Turicum is a Swiss-Brazilian period instrument group with a special interest in Brazilian works from Marcos Portugal's time, and their devotion comes across in this thoroughly sympathetic performance. The singing is fresh and immediate, the instrumental playing clear and jaunty. Though the solo performances aren't quite as consistent as the ensemble singing, the vocalists all perform with a spring in their step and an audible glint in their eyes.
—Berna Can

Antonio Vivaldi

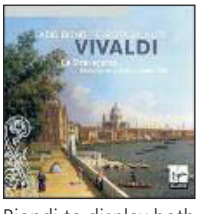
La Stravaganza: Edition by John Walsh, London 1728

Europa Galante, Fabio Biondi, violin and director
Virgin Classics (F) 50999 5193002 8
www.emiclassics.com

When the technical demands and solo displays of Vivaldi's music proved too extravagant for his clients, publisher John Walsh shrewdly pared the 12 concertos of *La Stravaganza* down to a more marketable edition of six. Period instrument iconoclasts Europa Galante and their violinist director Fabio Biondi have selected that 1728 London edition for this recording.

La Stravaganza has a modest representation on disc, with complete sets on period instruments by Monica Huggett and the Academy of Ancient Music and by Rachel Podger with Arte dei Suonatori. Fabio Biondi and Europa Galante now add this unique edition, recorded in 2008, to the catalog.

La Stravaganza is composed entirely of untitled works for solo



violin, strings, and continuo. Vivaldi's signature harmonies and virtuoso fireworks allow Biondi to display both his technical and dramatic prowess, for example the incisive entrance on RV383a or his agitated tone and clear articulation on RV357's racing finale. Biondi also applies subtle contrasts that make an otherwise mechanical passage sing: the third movement of RV383a features Biondi in grainy call and glistening response with himself, while he cultivates an airy, spacious tone against the gravity of the orchestra during the second movement of RV284.

Europa Galante strikes a balance between the heft of modern instrument ensembles and the lean texture of other period groups. Bass lines tend to boom, especially in the "bonus" concerto RV544's outer movements, but the ensemble remains transparent and light on its feet. The continuo is prominent but propulsive, although some listeners may find the harpsichord too busy. The use of organ for slow middle movements provides a smoother stage for Biondi's arias.

Parma's Biblioteca del Monastero di San Giovanni Evangelista provides a generous acoustic, even if some of Biondi's phrases are occasionally covered up during Vivaldi's denser accompaniments. This disc is a thrilling interpretation that whets one's appetite for Europa Galante's rendition of the other *La Stravaganza* concertos John Walsh didn't include.
—Andrew Sammut

COLLECTIONS

Airy Entertainments

Venere Lute Quartet
Lute Society of America LSA003
www.lutesocietyofamerica.org
www.venerelutequartet.com

In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the Netherlands were a heady place to be. Quite suddenly, land reclamation and maritime expansion brought wealth, luxury, and culture to what had only recently been soggy marshes tilled by arthritic peasants. This flowering of Amsterdam, Brussels, and other cities took a dramatic turn when the Reformation swept Northern Europe. One unfortunate casualty was the polyphonic traditions associated with the Catholic Church and Holy Roman Empire. Dutch music receded, never to regain its center place in European culture.

The Venere Lute Quartet is one of a number of ensembles resurrecting music for multiple plucked instruments. Both professional and amateur lute ensembles existed in the Low Lands, but little music has been preserved. Surviving literature is confined to a few collections. The voluminous, trans-Channel Thysius Lute Book provides the majority of the repertoire on this CD. Anyone familiar with 16th-century English dance suites will recognize many works, such as the "Galliarde de Royne d'Ecosse." Other repertoire

includes arrangements of compositions by Emanuel Adriaenssen (1554-1604) and Jan Sweelinck (*c.*1562-1621). The ensemble's own realizations, interpolations, and ornamentation complete the collection.

The quartet excellently re-creates this lost genre with elegant and rhythmically vital ensemble performances. Intonation, group coordination, and individual performances are all equally laudable and enjoyable. A nice middle point is found between ensemble clarity and soloistic expression, although more directional spacing in the final mix would have been welcome.
—Lance Hulme

The Business of Angels: English Recorder Music from the Stuart Era

Alison Melville, Lucas Harris, Nadina Mackie Jackson, Borys Medicky, Joëlle Morton
PIP1110
www.alisonmelville.com

A disc setting out to show a selection of almost all that could be played and heard on a recorder during the late-17th and early-18th centuries in England (even if the subtitle might suggest the inclusion of some earlier repertoire) could have resulted in a succession of disconnected tracks, but all the variety here gives the ear no chance to be bored.

London at the time must have been the recorder player's heaven on earth, with publishing houses sending out one work after the other that were adapted to the instrument or carefully composed for it. The abundance of recorder makers and instruction manuals that inundated the city back then suggests the large legacy we now enjoy.

Works by Handel, Daniel Purcell, Solomon Eccles, Luis Mercy, James Paisible, Godfrey Finger, William Topham, Thomas Tollett, and Corelli all feature accomplished Canadian recorder player Alison Melville—who also penned the simple but earnest notes in the booklet. There is cohesion in the playing style of these musicians. While the ensemble that surrounds Melville is altogether excellent, special mention must be given to bassoon player Nadina Mackie Jackson.

The booklet lacks information on the instruments used, which in the early music world is absolutely vital. Perhaps this could be made available in a future pressing of this successful album or at the artist's web site.
—Inês d'Avena

Cornucopia

Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado
BCOC001
www.BCOColorado.org

The Baroque Chamber Orchestra of Colorado, founded in 2005, concentrates on the rich chamber