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BOISMORTIER Sonatas for Bassoon: in a, op. 26/2; **in G,** op. 26/3; **in g,** op. 26/5; **in e,** op. 50/1; **in G,** op. 50/2. **Sonatas for Two Bassoons: in d,** op. 14/3; **in C,** op. 14/6; **in d,** op. 40/1; **in g,** op. 40/5. **Rondeau in a,** op. 40. **Chaconne in A,** op. 66 • Musica Franca • MSR 1170 (75:15)

Joseph Bodin de Boismortier (1689–1755) was born into an aristocratic family. The household relocated from Thionville to Metz and it was there that the young Boismortier received his first musical tuition from one Joseph Valette de Montigny. After a period of time in Perpignan, in the mid 1720s Boismortier moved to Paris where—according to *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*—he studied the violin with Antoine Dauvergne and composition with Rameau, eventually entering the service of Louis XIV. Boismortier also acquired publication rights allowing him to produce four to five collections per year. He bid the music trade adieu in 1752, a victim of the infamous War of the Buffoons, a rancorous debate between men of music and men of letters.

While he was musically active, Boismortier kept his finger on the pulse of the musical public, producing an enormous quantity of highly profitable works. During his lifetime over one hundred compositions or collections of compositions were printed. In October 1747, the *Mercure de France* observed that Boismortier earned enough money that he could live a life of fame and luxury without holding any official position. Indeed it is difficult not to agree with Jean-Benjamin de La Borde, who said, "He will always be regarded by professionals as a good harmonist. . . . anyone who will take the trouble to excavate this abandoned mine might find enough gold dust there to make up an ingot."

This French contemporary of Bach must be counted along with Telemann as one of the most prolific composers of the Baroque era. Boismortier wrote a great deal of music. Many of his compositions, intended for amateur ensembles, require only average technical skill and envisage various possible combinations of instruments, e.g., these sonatas for one and two bassoons and a set of concertos for five flutes, the first Italian-style concertos written by any French composer.

Although the cover of the CD indicates these are sonatas for two bassoons, they are part and parcel of four sets of works for two bass voices which offer a number of performing options, including two bassoons, bassoon and viola da gamba, two cellos, etc. I have segregated five of the sonatas from the rest, terming them sonatas for bassoon (with *continuo* accompaniment) since in these items the second bassoon is rarely—if at all—allotted anything beyond a supportive role. Although each of the sonatas is made up of four movements, the structure of the sonatas is varied. Some follow the form of the Italian *sonata da chiesa* while others are patterned after the *sonata da camera*, and within those structures, one encounters an intriguing amalgam of French and Italian styles. The selection for the CD was predicated—as the notes indicate—upon works that would offer a cross section of Boismortier's writing across his career. Facsimiles of the original printed editions have been used, "allowing us to come as close as possible to realizing the original intentions of the composer." The technical demands of these works are geared to the mass market and therefore are relatively modest, but their melodic appeal is immediate, giving further weight to La Borde's quote above.

Musica Franca (Mathieu Lussier and Nadina Mackie Jackson, bassoon; Fraser Jackson, contrabassoon; Sylvain Bergeron, theorbo, and Richard Paré, harpsichord and organ) is a Canadian ensemble that performs on modern instruments and specializes in the music of not only Boismortier but also his countryman Michel Corrette. Both were more than kind when it came to writing for the bassoon and both have potent and fervent advocates in this quintet of well-credentialed and critically acclaimed young musicians from north of the border.

There are no recordings that will afford me the opportunity for comparison, so I must adjudicate this MSR release without any other point of reference. Musica Franca's interpretations are certainly within the mainstream of the current thinking on Baroque performance practice. The soloists are full toned and nimble, easily capturing the spirit of the music without sounding superficial or labored and the performances are wealthy in understanding that far surpasses the printed page. The sound is good as well, with a nice blend and an audible but not ostentatious harpsichord.

This release will doubtless have a limited appeal, but for bassoonists and others whose curiosity is captured by this CD, there will be many pleasant moments. For others, a little of this repertoire will doubtless go a long way. **Michael Carter**