Beatus vir qui timet Dominum by Tarditi, and then Uccellini's *Aria sopra la Bergamesca*, a fiery flurry of frothy variations on a ground, played by violinists Julia Wedman and Aisslinn Nosky, with cellist Felix Deak and harpsichordist Olivier Fortin providing the continuo.

In the solo cantata *Morte di Lucrezia* by Montéclair, Gabrielle McLaughlin's intensely-focused voice finds warmth, meaning, and expressive purpose, accompanied with likewise passion by the ensemble.

The pyrotechnic *Partita VI* from *Harmonia Artificioso-ariosa* by Biber provides a dazzling showcase for I Furiosi. It's about as close as one gets to hearing early music played by a rock group like, say, Led Zeppelin! Put on this CD and turn up the volume.

Frank Nakashima

Sammartini - Six Symphonies
Aradia; Kevin Mallon
Naxos 8.557298

Who was it that influenced Gluck and J.C. Bach and had Boccherini play cello in his orchestra? To whom did Haydn pay homage in his early works? And who was the kindly-disposed listener of performances by the child prodigy, Wolfgang Amadeus, so admired by the prodigy's father, Leopold Mozart? Who was that composer, whose brother, Giuseppe, was the favourite oboist of Handel? Who composed 67 confirmed and 75 attributed symphonies? Give up? Giovanni Battista Sammartini, that's who. Today but a footnote in music history, this 7th out of 8 children of the French oboe player, Alexis Saint-Martin, was in his prime the toast of Milan. Mind you, at that time Milan was the toast of musical Europe, otherwise why would young Mozart seek to perform there?

From his late twenties until his death in 1775, Sammartini was a composer, organist and conductor in the Milanese cathedral and other celebrated churches; and one of the most prolific artists of the baroque era.

His works, when recorded with the scholarship and passion required, are proof positive that history is not only the greatest teacher, but may also be a harsh mistress – though all the works here collected should be in the standard baroque repertoire, they are usually nowhere to be found. Spirited, original and passionate, Sammartini's writing comes to full life under the careful baton of Kevin Mallon. The Irish-born artist, now as Canadian as the Maple Leafs, gives this forgotten master the treatment his works deserve. The Toronto-based Aradia Ensemble plays with great sensitivity, but also with a crispness that is pleasantly unexpected. Throughout the recording, they successfully avoid succumbing to the music-box preciousness so frequently befalling period music ensembles. A great disc and my new favourite for 'a little morning baroque music'.

Robert Tomas

Concert Note: Kevin Mallon is the guest conductor with the Scarborough Philharmonic on February 11.

Boismortier - Sonatas for 2 Bassoons and Continuo
Musica Franca
MSR Classics MS 1170

Corrette - Le Phenix; Les Delices de la Solitude
Musica Franca
MSR Classics MS 1171

Bassoons? It's about time someone took them seriously. The bassoon-centric ensemble Musica Franca is determined to make that point with these two very fine recordings. They present the work of two 18th century French composers, Boismortier and Corrette. The Boismortier sonatas are from his large body of instrumental works, many written for optional solo instruments. These selections are presumably the most bassoon-friendly.

The performances are light and transparent as the players meet the textural needs of the different tempi. Fast movements are wonderfully weightless and slower movements

sustain themselves with long phrases and flowing harpsichord arpeggios.

The Sonatas by Corrette, a younger contemporary of Boismortier, are even more playful and colourful than those by Boismortier.

The Sonata III in C major has some brief "funky" rhythms that solo bassoonist Nadina Mackie Jackson handles adeptly and with clear relish. Baroque guitarist Terry McKenna gets in his syncopated licks in the Sonata IV in B-flat major and the bassoons do wonderful hunting horn imitations in the fourth movement of the same sonata.

Fraser Jackson plays contrabassoon with alacrity and lightness, holding back the otherwise formidable power of this leviathan. Jackson also does some very fine arranging as in the Corrette Organ Concerto No.1 in which the bassoons and baroque guitar take the string parts.

These players clearly have a great affection for this entire repertoire and the instruments chosen to express it. There's a good deal of freedom with tempo and phrasing. It offers deep feeling to the music in a way that seems completely natural to both composers' intent. Tone throughout the bassoons' register is delicious - never constricted at the top or rude at the low end. This is ensemble playing of great mutual respect and undeniable musicality.

The ensemble's production values are high. They balance the intimacy of their audible breaths and instrumental key clicks with the spacious acoustics of St. Anne's Anglican Church – Toronto's architectural homage to Byzantium. Engineer David vR Bowles' achievement is noteworthy.

If you're suspicious that a little bassoon music might really go a long way - these recordings will provide more satisfying listening than thought possible. Musica Franca knows what they're doing. Enjoy these and look forward to their next release.

Alex Baran

CLASSICAL AND BEYOND

Beethoven -
The Piano Sonatas, Volume 1
Andras Schiff
ECM New Series 1940/41

Only a handful of pianists have achieved the monumental task of recording Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas. Some of the greatest have never attempted it, some died before completing it. The brilliant and accomplished Hungarian pianist, Andras Schiff, is the latest candidate attempting to scale the Olympian heights with this 2 CD set, the first of a projected eight volumes, recorded live in Zurich's Tonhalle.

According to Schiff's own words, having been "confronted with a strong interpretation that stretches back as far as Liszt", he deliberately waited to reach sufficient maturity to be worthy of playing Beethoven. I think it was worth the wait.

These four early sonatas are Beethoven's first attempts at the form and come from 1792-96, his early Vienna period. Op.2/1 is amazingly mature. It seems to jump out of Jupiter's head like Minerva. It is full of youthful energy but still much influenced by Haydn. Then comes the Op.2/3, a marvelous virtuoso piece quite unlike anything Mozart or Haydn ever wrote. The lengthy, introspective Op.7 is again a major step forward, gradually breaking away from the classic mould into a more original "Romantic" expression.

Schiff's interpretations are lucid, his palette is crisp yet spontaneous and all voices come out crystal-clear. Tempos are well judged and his technique is flawless. His sensitive touch and imagination bring out the many mood changes and create unforgettable moments throughout.

Scholarly documentation enclosed. Beethoven for the 21st century. Highly recommended.

Janos Gardonyi