

a **VIVALDI** *Che giova il sospirar. La farfalletta s'aggira al lume. Se ben vivono senz'alma. All'ombra di sospetto. Bassoon Concerto in e, RV 484. Recorder Concerto in c, RV 441* • Tone Wik (sop); Per Hannisdal (bsn); Alexandra Opsahl (rec); Barokkanerne (period instruments) • 2L 56 (Hybrid multichannel SACD: 64:04)

Antonio Vivaldi's 36 known chamber cantatas—roughly the same quantity as his bassoon concertos—are no longer the discographic rarities they once were, and some—including at least two on this new disc—are enjoying multiple recent recordings. This new all-Norwegian production (performers and label) is one of the most attractive Vivaldi cantata collections available, a combination of remarkably lovely (and, when necessary, virtuosic) singing, impulsive and assured instrumentalism, and aggressive but pure recorded sound.

The cantata texts generally revolve around love and its joys and sorrows, employing many a classical allusion and conceit. The scoring is typically for voice and continuo, although RV 679, *Che giova*, requires full strings and RV 678, *All'ombra*, involves obbligato flute. Substantial *da capo* arias alternate with brief recitatives in three- and four-movement patterns, and the writing can be quite emotionally and pictorially expressive, though not consistently so.

Tone Wik is a vibrant, light, agile soprano who seems to find Vivaldi's sometimes challenging writing not the least bit taxing, and she knows how to tell a story and convey changing moods without resorting to mannerism. Like an increasing number of younger early-music singers, she is quite happy to restore a bit of vibrato to much of the vocal line, while indulging in generous ornamentation (which never gets in the way of her lyrical expression). The Norwegian period-instrument group Barokkanerne is equally impressive, particularly the soloists in the two wind concertos. Bassoonist Per Hannisdal has a rich, dark tone and conveys urgency without excessive speed; recorder soloist Alexandra Opsahl is a terrifically nimble player who deserves a Vivaldi album all to herself.

The performers are recorded from a very close perspective, almost literally “in your face,” which can exhaust the listener after a while; yet the acoustics are warm rather than harsh, and somehow the microphones don't capture any extraneous noise from the instruments. Occasionally, some instruments seem to be positioned behind the listener, but this is not a consistent effect.

This is a treat for lovers of Italian Baroque vocal music and for audiophiles alike.
James Reel

