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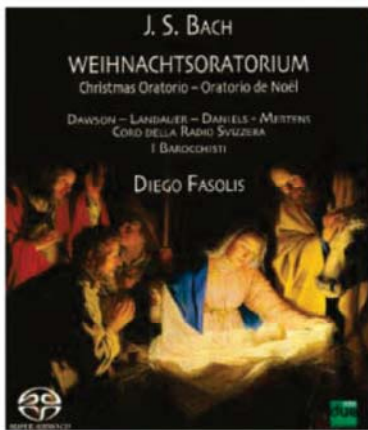
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RECORDINGS IN THE ROUND *All vocal, all baroque, all-around wonderful*

ARTS

authentic

Amsterdam (Challenge Classics CC 76607), I declare it No Contest for performance *and* sound—this new recording is performed with such commitment and intensity that the others seem almost bland. Some listeners might prefer a more pious approach, considering the occasion, but as pure musical delight, this triumphs. And Arts Music has found a balance between a natural, moderately ambient sound and outstanding transparency.

I Barocchisti's performances of these works by Handel have an infectiously theatrical flair that I also can't resist. Perhaps because the vocal soloists, Julia Gooding and Jeremy Ovenden, are British, this otherwise Swiss performance sounds as authentically English as any I know of. The *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day* is a performance to rival the classic performances of memory, none of which sounds nearly as rich. Francesco Cera performs the Organ Concerto 13 with a style that makes the recent set by Richard Egarr (Harmonia Mundi HMU807446) sound timid and pale—and the performance and sound of the *Coronation Anthem* "Zadok the Priest" are spectacular.



ARTS

authentic

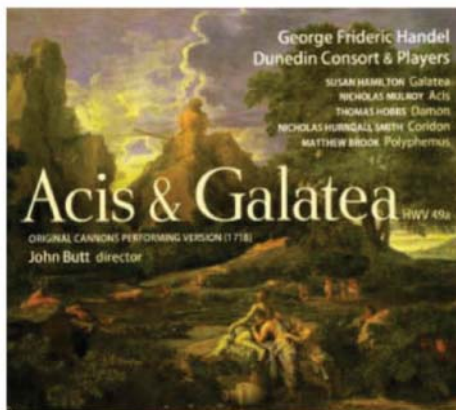
J.S. BACH: *Christmas Oratorio, BWV 248*

Bernhard Landauer, countertenor; Charles Daniels, tenor; Klaus Mertens, bass; Swiss Radio Chorus, I Barocchisti; Diego Fasolis, conductor
Arts Music 47744-8 (2 SACD/CDs)

HANDEL: *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day, Organ Concerto 13, Coronation Anthem 1*

Julia Gooding, soprano; Jeremy Ovenden, tenor; Duilio Galfetti, violin; Francesco Cera, organ; Swiss Radio Chorus, I Barocchisti; Diego Fasolis, conductor
Arts Music 47738-8 (SACD/CD)

A double whammy from I Barocchisti, conductor Diego Fasolis, and Arts Music! From the first sounds on this recording of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* I hear irresistible joy and zest. The work enjoys several lovely recordings on SACD, but after reacquainting myself with those by Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Concentus Musicus Wien (Deutsche Harmonia Mundi 88697112252), Jos van Veldhoven and the Netherlands Bach Society (Channel Classics CCS SA 20103), and Jan Willem de Vriend and Combattimento Consort



HANDEL: *Acis and Galatea*

Susan Hamilton, Galatea; Nicholas Mulroy, Acis; Thomas Hobbs, Damon; Nicholas Hurdall Smith, Coridon; Matthew Brook, Polyphemus; Dunedin Consort & Players; John Butt, conductor
Linn CKD 319 (2 SACD/CDs)

I fondly remember being introduced to this work in the 1960s via the classic and brilliant Decca recording of scenes by Joan Sutherland, Peter Pears, Owen Brannigan, and Adrian Boult (reissued

on CD as Chandos CHAN 3147). Since then there have been a string of excellent performances, most in the traditional Mozart arrangement. Now Linn offers us a thoroughly marvelous multichannel set by the Dunedin Consort and Players of Handel's original "Cannons" performing version of 1718. The use of one voice or instrument to a part sacrifices very little of the "orchestral" sound of the familiar Mozart version, but it does provide much more detail and clarity throughout. But fear not—this thoroughly virtuosic yet charming performance can stand with the classic Boult. Moreover, it's offered in Linn's spacious, balanced sound.

VIVALDI: *Bellezza Crudel*

Cantatas and Concertos
Tone Wik, soprano; Alexandra Opsahl, recorder; Per Hannisdal, bassoon; Barokkanerne
2L 56SACD (SACD/CD)

What a delightful way to spend an hour! All of these four solo cantatas feature the meltingly lovely soprano of Tone Wik accompanied by a period ensemble, Barokkanerne, that does not wear its H.I.P. label on its sleeve. In fact, they produce warm, colorful sounds that are vividly conveyed in a wide, almost wraparound soundstage, as is typical of recordings made by Norwegian label 2L. Interspersed with the cantatas are one concerto each for bassoon and recorder. In these, the accompanying ensemble is consistent, while the solo instrument, like the soprano, is recorded front and center—we hear the wonderful richness and buzz of the bassoon and the cool, calming woodiness of the recorder, both with almost stunning clarity.

—Kalman Rubinson

