



Instrumentation in the Baroque era was a flexible proposition, and composers such as Bach would have expected their music to be freely adapted to various ensembles and performing contexts.

The Norwegian ensemble Bergen Barokk demonstrates this principle quite convincingly in this varied program of chamber music. The famous *Anna Magdalena Notebook* is taken as the point of departure for a mix of sonatas, dances, church music, and secular and spiritual songs—the sort of fare that might have been performed in intimate musical evenings in the home.

The disc opens with what many listeners will recognize as the Viola da Gamba Sonata in G Major, BWV 1027, which Bach also arranged as the Trio Sonata, BWV 1039; here it is adapted as a trio sonata for recorder, gamba, and continuo, using material from both versions. The new instrumentation lends the music a dusky ambiance and does much to clarify the intertwining lines. From the start of the opening *Adagio* there is a certain hesitancy and ponderousness in Bergen Barokk's ensemble, as if the musicians were constantly holding back the pulse; fortunately this feeling does not long remain, although there are occasional moments of less-than-airtight ensemble. The rest of the program includes dances and arias from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook*, canons and fugues from the *Musical Offering*, assorted chorale adaptations, and even an arrangement for gamba of the Sarabande from the A-Minor Flute Partita, BWV 1013. Recorder player Frode Thorsen is a prominent presence, playing with great spirit and rhythmic flexibility and even “bending” an occasional note in “blues” fashion. For those of us who find the recorder a bit taxing to listen to over long periods, soprano Mona Julsrud provides an antidote. Her vocally pleasing contributions include several chorale arrangements (among them *Wachet auf*), the evergreen love song *Bist du bei mir* (actually by Heinrich Stölzl, not Bach), and *So oft meine Tobackspfeife*, Bach's tribute to pipe smoking and the philosophic musings to which it gives rise.

The faint of heart are advised to brace themselves at the end of track 14: At this point, having finished an Aria from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook*, the instrumentalists suddenly begin a volley of impromptu sliding and wailing (as if they are retuning their instruments) and then launch into the famous *Musette*, in which Thorsen embellishes his line with wild swoops reminiscent of a slide whistle. True, this is a rustic piece, but the whole thing comes out of nowhere and feels a little too gimmicky.

The church acoustic is quite spacious; the harpsichord tends to get buried in the larger ensemble numbers (e.g. the trio sonata) but sounds fine elsewhere. The CD booklet (in Norwegian and English, confusingly laid out) provides no succinct lineup of the performers (there are individual bios), and individual track titles are printed only on the back of the case and booklet in miniscule print. Moreover, texts are missing for some of the vocal selections. There is, however, an informative essay by Thorsen entitled “Recycled Bach” which gives some historical background on music in the home during Bach's time.

The *Anna Magdalena Notebook* has been recorded a number of times, both in whole and in part, including a Nonesuch disc featuring the harpsichordist Igor Kipnis. That disc is more

dryly recorded, with Kipnis miked very closely and the singing (including soprano Judith Blegen) tending more towards “modern” operatic-type vocalizing as opposed to the early-music-schooled singing on the present disc. An alternative reading of the G-Major Trio Sonata, BWV 1039, is that by Florilegium on Channel, who exhibit a more consistently tight ensemble than Bergen Barokk; but the choice of two flutes for the solo lines does not equal the color and variety of the Norwegians’ version. **Michael De Sapio**

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